



CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF  
BROKEN BAY

HISTORY, MYSTERY, MAJESTY

# ADVENT 2025

Waiting in joyful hope for the coming  
of the Prince of Peace



YEAR A



DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY  
2025 ADVENT PROGRAM (YEAR A)  
THEME: HISTORY, MYSTERY, MAJESTY

GOSPEL REFLECTIONS

Rev Alex Peter Selvaraj MSFS  
Wyoming Parish



*nihil obstat:*

Rev Dr John Hill  
Diocesan Censor  
25 October 2025

*imprimatur:*

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL  
Bishop of Broken Bay  
30 October 2025

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# INTRODUCTION



As the season of Advent begins, we are invited once again to enter a time of stillness, hope, and holy expectation.

Advent calls us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, past, present, and future, and to discover anew the wonder of God's love made flesh amongst us.

This year, our Advent theme, "History, Mystery, and Majesty," invites us to reflect on the richness of God's saving story. We look back through History, remembering the faith of those who have gone before us and the unfolding of God's promise through time. We enter into the Mystery of the Incarnation, God dwelling amongst us, in simplicity and grace. We lift our eyes to the Majesty of Christ, whose reign of peace and love redeems our world and our hearts.

As we draw this Holy Year of Hope to a close, we give thanks for the abundant graces God has poured out upon our Community of the Church of Broken Bay. This sacred season bridges the conclusion of our Jubilee and the joyful anticipation of our 40th anniversary in 2026. This milestone calls us to gratitude, renewal, and hope for the future.

May this Advent resource be a companion on your journey through these weeks of waiting and wonder. As we light each candle and draw nearer to the celebration of the birth of Christ, may we see with fresh eyes the history that has shaped us, the mystery that sustains us, and the majesty that awaits us in the glory of Emmanuel, God with us.

+ Anthony Randazzo

**Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL**  
Bishop of Broken Bay

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet invites you to reflect prayerfully on the Sunday Gospel Readings in Advent. It can be used individually or as part of a group. The notes below are provided for use in a small group context. For each of the four weeks of Advent, this resource includes a reading of the Gospel text, a reflection on the text, and a personal testimony, along with reflection questions to guide discussion.

It is suggested that you allocate 1 ½ hours to complete each session, and the following process is recommended:

## ONE

### OPENING PRAYER (10 MINS)

An Opening Prayer is offered, which may be read together by participants. Hymn suggestions are given for each week which you may wish to consider using as part of the gathering prayer time for the group.

## TWO

### GOSPEL READING (15 MINS)

To allow participants to prepare themselves well to hear God speak through the Sacred Scriptures, you may wish to pray the Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom prior to reading the Gospel text. Listen to the Gospel Reading by inviting a participant from the group to proclaim. After the reading, pause for silent reflection for a few moments. Invite people to share one insight into what they are hearing through the text. This is not a time for discussion, but an invitation to offer a short comment. The group listens attentively to each person without responding.

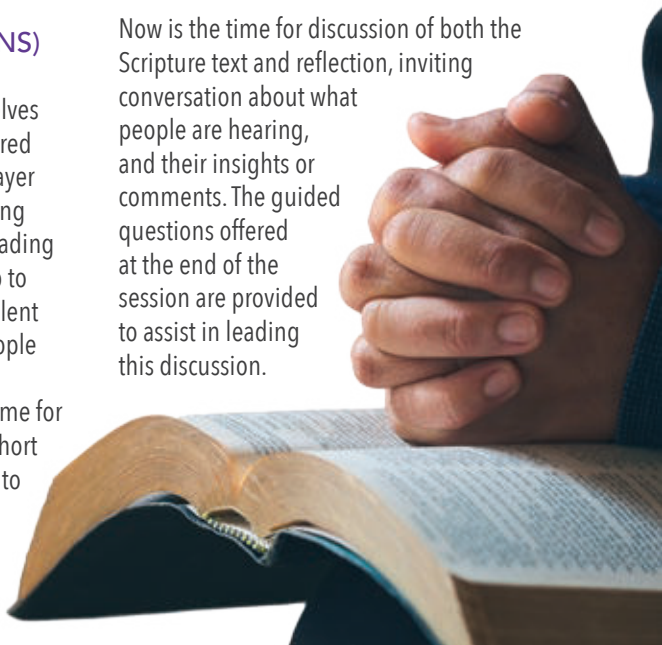
## THREE

### REFLECTION WITH GUIDED QUESTIONS (35 MINS)

A reflection is offered on the Gospel Reading, drawing out the themes of the Gospel.

Invite participants to read the reflection, one paragraph each. They may wish to underline phrases that they particularly notice.

Now is the time for discussion of both the Scripture text and reflection, inviting conversation about what people are hearing, and their insights or comments. The guided questions offered at the end of the session are provided to assist in leading this discussion.



## FOUR

## PERSONAL STORY (25 MINS)

A personal testimony is offered that is related to the Gospel Reading. It is suggested that this could be read quietly by participants, whilst underlining phrases that stand out for them. Discuss the Personal Story, asking: What aspects of the testimony spoke to you most deeply? How is this story encouraging you in your faith journey?

To conclude the session, invite participants to respond to what they have heard and discussed during the whole session. How have they been called to respond? What action might they take? They may wish to write down one or two personal actions that they could take into their week in the space provided. There is no obligation to share these.

## FIVE

## CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINS)

To conclude, pray the final prayer together.

PRAYER OF SAINT JOHN  
CHRYSOSTOM BEFORE  
READING THE SCRIPTURE

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear your word and understand and do your will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law. Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom. On You I set my hope, O my God, that You will enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. For You are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness, and from You comes every good deed and every gift.

AMEN.

## THEMES FOR REFLECTION

### CHRIST COMES: IN HISTORY, IN MYSTERY AND IN MAJESTY

“When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s (St. John the Baptist) birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (CCC #524)

The Catechism reminds us that during the season of Advent we recall the coming of Jesus Christ in **history**, some 2025 years ago, aware that He will one day come again in **majesty** at the end of time.

In between those two events, Jesus expressed His desire for us to abide in Him and He in us (see Jn 15:4). He makes this possible through the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, where He comes to us in **mystery**. Advent presents an opportunity for us to reflect upon these ways that our Lord comes to us, as individuals and together, as His Church.

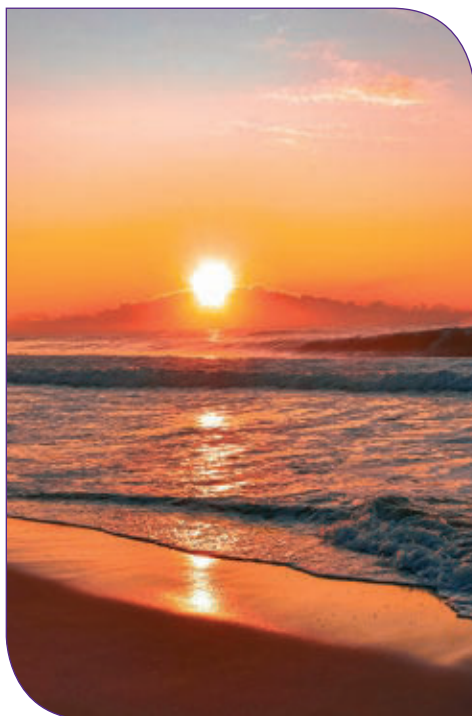
As the liturgy during Advent makes present the “ancient expectancy of the Messiah” we are invited to participate in this anticipation of His coming to us in three ways:

i. We recall and ponder the events of His coming in **history** through reading both

the Gospel accounts of His coming, and by learning more about the prophetic words in the centuries leading up to His coming.

ii. We can embrace His coming in Sacrament and **mystery** by setting aside some time for Him during Advent – ideally spending that time in Adoration where available – and asking Him to prepare our hearts for Christmas as if our hearts were to be the manger in which He is placed as an infant.

iii. We can reflect upon our hope for Heaven, where we will encounter Him in **majesty**!





## ACCOMPANYING THE EXPECTANT MARY

“And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” **Luke 1:43-45**

**W**hat a gift, that the mother of Our Lord should come to each one of us, and invite us to accompany her during the season of Advent! One of the reasons Mary is blessed is that she believed that the promises to her would be fulfilled. In Advent, we share both in her

expectant hope, and in her trust. Do you believe that God wants good things for you? Do you trust that His promises to YOU will be fulfilled?

What was it like for Elizabeth, in those months where she and Mary were each waiting, full of joy, full of hope? What was it like for Joseph, walking with Mary, concerned for her welfare, and for that of her unborn child? Which do you relate with more? Joy, hope... perhaps a little fear of the unknown... you are invited to put yourself prayerfully in the shoes of one of the biblical figures to accompany Mary, and speak with your Blessed Mother in prayer as if you were accompanying her in the leadup to Jesus' birth!

## WE WAIT IN JOYFUL HOPE FOR THE PRINCE OF PEACE

## Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

*(Introit of the Mass of Christmas Day)*

**T**he Old Testament is full of promises. The Patriarchs that make up the origin story of the Hebrews of antiquity – and also of we Christians – were promised a continued lineage, a land, and blessing. They were promised God's

presence, provision and protection. These promises were sealed with covenants along the way... and through division and exile and all sorts of war and calamity, the people were invited to a deeper trust in God. The prophets were sent to prepare the way for the fulfilment of these promises, telling us how to recognise the One God sent.

In our own time, where war, calamity and division continue throughout the world, we wait in joyful hope for the Prince of Peace, the one who was promised, the one in whom all of God's promises are fulfilled!

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SUNDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2025

## MUSIC SUGGESTION

1. Come, Lord! Maranatha  
– Ricky Manalo CSP
2. Coming Glory – Vineyard Anaheim

## OPENING PRAYER

Loving and gracious God,

awaken our hearts this Advent to recognise Your coming in the silence and in the stirrings of daily life. Keep us watchful in hope, faithful in love, and alive in prayer.

May we be found ready when You knock, with lamps lit and the ears of our hearts open to your Word.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

## GOSPEL READING

**Matthew 24:37-44 (NRSV)**

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew*

Jesus spoke to his disciples:

"As the days of Noah were,  
so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as in those days before the flood  
they were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage,  
until the day Noah entered the ark,  
and they knew nothing

until the flood came and swept them all away,  
so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field;

one will be taken and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding meal together;

one will be taken and one will be left.

"Keep awake, therefore,

for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

But understand this:

if the owner of the house had known

in what part of the night the thief was coming,

he would have stayed awake

and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready,  
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING  
MATTHEW

Jesus the Messiah  
the genealogy of  
the Son of Man and

## IN THE SILENCE OF MY HEART

*"In the secret of my heart, teach me wisdom" (Psalm 51:6)*

You are invited to take 3-5 minutes to silently re-read the passage you have just heard. We encourage you to underline one or two things from the passage that stood out to you. Feel free to write down – for yourself and no one else – anything new or insightful that the Lord might have placed on your heart to ponder. No matter how plain or simple or deep or profound these thoughts may be, take one more moment to thank Jesus for His word to you before returning to the group.

### GOSPEL REFLECTION

Christ could be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but all is in vain until He is born in me. Advent does not begin with Christmas lights or decorations, but with a Gospel that unsettles us. Jesus recalls the time of Noah, when people were busy eating and drinking, marrying and celebrating, but failed to notice the flood until it was too late. His warning is not meant to frighten us but to awaken us: God's coming is certain, yet often hidden, like a thief in the night, breaking into the ordinary moments of life when we least expect it.

This Advent, the Church invites us to open our eyes and hearts to this coming. The same Lord who entered history in Bethlehem is the One who comes to us now in mystery through His Word and Sacraments, and who will one day come in majesty to gather all creation into His Kingdom. These are not three separate comings, but one great movement of love: God continually breaking into our lives until His promise is fulfilled.

I recall a simple story. A security guard was being farewelled after 36 years of service in a bank. During all those years, nothing bad had ever happened. When asked about his secret, he simply smiled and said, "I stayed awake." His quiet vigilance protected what was entrusted to him. In the same way, spiritual watchfulness protects our hearts from drifting away from the Lord. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, "He who is awake in faith will never be surprised by the Master's coming."

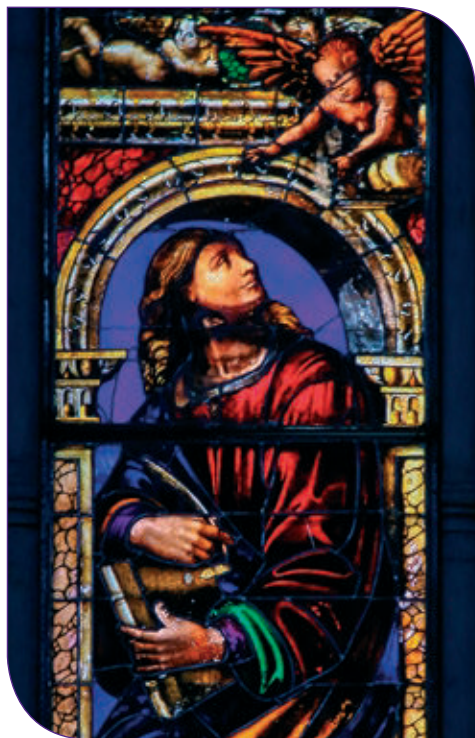
We are also in the Jubilee Year of Hope. The Jubilee logo beautifully captures our Christian journey. The four stylised figures represent humanity coming from the four corners of the world. Red stands for love, orange for human warmth, green for peace and balance, and blue for security. These figures journey together toward the Cross, not alone, but united in hope. So too, this Advent is a time for us to journey together as a people of hope, trusting that Christ walks with us and will come again to fulfil His promises.

Hope is the theme for our Jubilee year. As St. Paul reminds us, "...and hope does not disappoint us..." (Rom5:5), a promise that lifts our hearts even in the midst of life's uncertainties. There is a beautiful Latin phrase, "sperare est spirare" which translates in English to, "to hope is to breathe." Just as breathing is essential to life, so hope is essential to the soul. Hope is to the soul what breathing is to the body. Just as food nourishes the body, the Sacraments nourish the soul. Just as a treadmill strengthens the body, morning prayer strengthens the soul. To stay awake spiritually

is to be anchored in daily prayer, sincere repentance, acts of love, and attentiveness to God's Word.

Advent is not only about waiting; it is about waking up. If Christ comes to us today in the poor, will He find us asleep? If He comes to us in the Eucharist, will He find us distracted? If He comes at the end of time, will He find us ready? St. Augustine once said, *"God is always coming to us, but we are often not at home."* Advent is our time to "be at home" with God, alert, ready, and hopeful.

So let us live this season with lamps burning, hearts awake, and hope alive. Christ will come, in mystery today, and in majesty one day. Blessed are those who are ready when He knocks.



## CHECKING IN WITH MY SOUL

In what ways am I "asleep" in my daily life, distracted, complacent, or too busy scrolling my phone to notice Christ's presence?

Christ could be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but what concrete steps can I take this Advent to allow Him to be born in my heart?

How can I cultivate hope in my daily life, especially in situations that feel uncertain or difficult?

If Christ comes to me today in the poor, the lonely, or the vulnerable, will He find me ready? What concrete act of kindness or service can I commit to this week to encounter Him in others, without pretending I have it all together?

## PERSONAL STORY

**Colleen Smith, Pastoral Associate  
at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish,  
The Entrance**

Reflecting on Sunday's Gospel, Matthew 24:37 – 44, I can't help but draw deep connections to my own life experiences, especially those from my childhood in the NSW Central West. Growing up surrounded by the cycles of farming, I learned early on about resilience, community, and the unwavering hope that guides us through uncertainty.

Matthew's message resonates strongly with me as it speaks of being prepared for the unexpected, much like how a farmer waits in hope for rain. My upbringing was steeped in this duality of hope and hardship. The

harsh droughts we faced would often turn our landscapes barren, yet they also brought my family and our community together in solidarity. Sundays at St Isidore's, our small town Catholic church in Tullibigeal, were not just routine; they were sacred gatherings where we came together to share our vulnerabilities and dreams, mirroring the communal spirit Jesus calls us to uphold in the Gospel.

The urgency embedded in the scripture reflects the principles modelled by my community. We prayed together, not only for rain but for the strength to face whatever challenges lay ahead. Those prayers strengthened our bonds, similar to how a hen gathers and nurtures her chicks. Each gathering served as a powerful reminder that while we could not control external forces like drought or plague, we held the power to choose how we responded. Together, we bore each other's burdens and nurtured hope.

Living the unpredictable nature of farm life often mirrored the uncertainties of our spiritual journeys. During tough times, my family found comfort in knowing we weren't alone. Sharing stories over meals with family and friends after Mass became our way to process challenges, a testament to our perseverance that reinforced our ties. Every laugh shared or moment of grief woven into those gatherings fortified a collective spirit ready to embrace both difficulties and miracles.

Reflecting on this Gospel passage and its call for readiness, I recognise that the essence of hope is more than mere optimism; it's an active choice. It's about nurturing relationships that uplift us, keeping our faith alive despite trials, and finding the strength

to support those around us. Like the farmers who shaped my upbringing, I aim to cultivate a spirit of readiness for not only the hardships that come our way but also for the often overlooked blessings.

Matthew's words remind me to remain vigilant and foster connections, especially in our fast paced world filled with uncertainties. I find inspiration in the community that surrounded my childhood. By coming together, sharing our stories, and supporting one another, we can stand resilient against life's inevitable storms. Strengthening our bonds echoes the promise that even amidst trials, brighter days are ahead, reflecting the hope that arises when we gather in faith and love.

### CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, source of all hope,

as we journey through this Advent season, awaken in us a spirit of watchfulness and hope.

May the lessons of our lives, in joy and in drought, in flood and in hope, shape our hearts that we are ready to receive You.

Strengthen our bonds, deepen our faith, and help us walk together, patient, prepared, and full of trust in Your promise.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SUNDAY 7 DECEMBER 2025

## MUSIC SUGGESTION

1. A Voice Cries Out – Michael Jonas
2. Ready the Way – Curtis Stephan

## OPENING PRAYER

God of mercy and hope,  
in this holy season of Advent, awaken our hearts  
to the voice crying out in the wilderness.

Help us to turn toward You with humility and  
trust, ready to bear the fruits of repentance.

Prepare in us a straight path for Your coming,  
that we may walk together in hope.

We ask this through Christ our Light,

**Amen.**

## GOSPEL READING

**Matthew 3:1-12 (NRSV)**

*A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Matthew*

In those days John the Baptist  
appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke  
when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.'"

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair  
with a leather belt around his waist,  
and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea  
were going out to him,  
and all the region along the Jordan,  
and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan,  
confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees  
coming for baptism,

John said to them, "You brood of vipers!  
Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

"Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Do not presume to say to yourselves,

'We have Abraham as our ancestor';

for I tell you, God is able from these stones  
to raise up children to Abraham.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees;  
every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit  
is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptise you with water for repentance,  
but one who is more powerful than I is coming after  
me;

I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand,

and he will clear his threshing floor

and will gather his wheat into the granary;

but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## IN THE SILENCE OF MY HEART

*"In the secret of my heart, teach me wisdom"  
(Psalm 51:6)*

You are invited to take 3-5 minutes to silently  
re-read the passage you have just heard. We  
encourage you to underline one or two things  
from the passage that stood out to you. Feel free



to write down – for yourself and no one else – anything new or insightful that the Lord might have placed on your heart to ponder. No matter how plain or simple or deep or profound these thoughts may be, take one more moment to thank Jesus for His word to you before returning to the group.

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

The Gospel of this Second Sunday of Advent resounds with a bold and urgent voice: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Mt3:2). In the wilderness of Judea, John the Baptist emerges as the herald of a new dawn. Advent is precisely this: a time of holy urgency, a time to awaken from slumber and prepare the way for the Lord who has come in history, comes now in mystery, and will come again in majesty. In Advent, these comings of Christ are stitched together as one continuous

movement of love. It is both a remembrance, an encounter, and an anticipation.

This year, we journey through Advent within the Jubilee Year of Hope. The second symbol of the Jubilee logo is the Cross. We find one figure holding onto the Cross. The Cross is not rigid or static but shows a posture of leaning, bending toward humanity. The Cross, as the symbol of Christ, reveals His presence reaching out, accompanying people in their struggles. It is simple yet profound: the Cross stands at the centre, embraced by four figures journeying together. Just as John the Baptist pointed beyond himself toward the One who was to come, the Cross points beyond earthly trials toward the horizon of redemption. The Cross is not just a sign of suffering; it is the meeting point between heaven and earth. Advent invites us to stand at the foot of the Cross, where human weakness meets God’s mercy.



John's call to repentance is not a harsh command but a merciful invitation. To repent (metanoia) means to change direction, to turn from darkness toward the light that is already leaning toward us. The leaning Cross in the Jubilee logo powerfully reminds us that God makes the first move. He bends toward us so that we may find the courage to turn back to Him.

A simple image can help us understand this: a tree laden with fruit bending its branches low so even a small child can reach out and receive it. God does not remain distant, waiting for us to climb up. Instead, He bends down, meeting us where we are. Repentance, then, is our act of reaching out to grasp the grace that God has already extended. "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:8).

John warns, "Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Mt3:10). This is not meant to crush us with fear but to awaken us to bear the fruit of repentance, fruits of justice, mercy, forgiveness, and hope. It is about removing what hinders love so that God's grace can flow freely.

St. John Vianney once said, "The good God will forgive a repentant sinner even before he finishes asking." Repentance is not an act of shame but of love; turning toward the One who has already turned toward us. This Advent, as the Cross leans toward us, may we bend our hearts in humility and trust. Let us allow Christ to shape the desert of our hearts into a path for His coming. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mt3:3).

## CHECKING IN WITH MY SOUL

If the Cross is already leaning toward me, what small branch of my life might I reach out to God today and can I do it without tripping over my own excuses?

Am I so busy "climbing the tree" of life that I forget God has already bent down to meet me where I am? How might I notice His gentle approach this week?

Repentance is a change of direction, not a punishment. Where might I need to pivot? Can I laugh a little at the times I've been heading the wrong way?

If Advent is about preparing the way for the Lord, what small desert in my heart needs Christ's path straightened, and what funny little obstacles (my grumpiness, my stubbornness) might I remove first?

## PERSONAL STORY

**O'Kelly Tam, Parish Support Officer,  
Clergy & Parishes Broken Bay**

Some years ago during Advent, my family used to take me to this Christmas window display outside a certain department store in the city – a festive show of puppets in locomotion with every one of them animated, and often synchronised with the background music. Years later I took my children to the Christmas windows and saw the similar excitement and curiosity I had before, in their eyes. Yet I remembered vividly that somehow, there was a moment I didn't hear any of the cacophony from the city crowd around me but felt a sense



of peace, and an image of the Holy Family came into my mind.

It was brief but a small gift from God – a peace and quietness that allowed me to appreciate that memory of seeing the joy in my children, together with the reminder that the occasion was because of Christ Jesus' coming into the world.

I also used to frequent the city a lot on the way for studies and later work. Very often I saw a man wearing a sandwich board hung with straps over his shoulders. But apart from the usual "Jesus loves you" (as you would expect) the words I remember to this day was a passage in this Sunday's Gospel Reading:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand."

I was always busy on route to the next place, and therefore did not stop to respond to what I later realised to be God's message to me and many others, even today. In our busyness we often have many things in our thoughts that prevent us to slow down or even stop for a moment briefly, to reflect on the many ways that God speaks to us, reaches out to us, and lets us know and feel that we are loved by Him.

Interestingly, John the Baptist did not preach in a city like that billboard man, but instead in the desolate wilderness. Either way, whether we heard God's message in the city, or during a retreat, we were called to go to the wilderness of our hearts – where lies our troubles, our stress from work or study, conflict with our loved ones, our grief – and He asked us to be ready.

God speaks to us in our busyness as well as during our meditation and praying, but I've learned that I had to make time, often a quiet place even, to reflect on the day earlier – and whatever the message was, it would accompany with a peaceful feeling. So I would set some time to enter the wilderness in my heart and listen to Him, to be in the moment of presence before the Holy Sacrament, or to meditate on the love radiating from Mary and Joseph's eyes as they looked upon Jesus. That moment of peace, where everything goes still, where God comforts us in our distress, is whence we could share the Kingdom of God with others who are caught in the busyness of their lives.

### CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, source of all hope,

in this season of Advent, You call us to turn toward You, not in fear, but in peace, as You lean toward us in love.

Amid the noise of our busy lives, help us find moments of stillness where we can hear Your voice, recognise Your presence, and prepare our hearts as a manger for Christ.

May we carry the peace we receive into the world, becoming signs of hope and joy for those still searching in the wilderness.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

14 DECEMBER 2025

## MUSIC SUGGESTION

1. Come Thou Long Expected Jesus  
– Novum Collective
2. Advent Litany – Bernadette Farrell

## OPENING PRAYER

God of steadfast love,

in the midst of life's rough waves and struggles,  
remind us that You are our unshakable  
lighthouse, guiding us with hope and light.  
Help us to trust in Your presence even when the  
path is hard, carrying joy that shines through  
our doubts and fears. May we be a source  
of hope and kindness to those around us,  
reflecting Your love in every small act.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**



## GOSPEL READING

**Matthew 11:2-11 (NRSV)**

*A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Matthew*

When John heard in prison what the  
Messiah was doing,  
he sent word by his disciples  
who said to Jesus,  
"Are you the one who is to come,  
or are we to wait for another?"  
Jesus answered them,  
"Go and tell John what you hear and see:  
the blind receive their sight,  
the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed,  
the deaf hear, the dead are raised,  
and the poor have good news brought to them.  
And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

As they went away,  
Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John:  
"What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?  
A reed shaken by the wind?  
What then did you go out to see?  
Someone dressed in soft robes?  
Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.  
What then did you go out to see?  
A prophet?  
Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.  
This is the one about whom it is written,  
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women  
no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist;  
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## IN THE SILENCE OF MY HEART

*"In the secret of my heart, teach me wisdom"  
(Psalm 51:6)*

You are invited to take 3-5 minutes to silently re-read the passage you have just heard. We encourage you to underline one or two things from the passage that stood out to you. Feel free to write down – for yourself and no one else – anything new or insightful that the Lord might have placed on your heart to ponder. No matter how plain or simple or deep or profound these thoughts may be, take one more moment to thank Jesus for His word to you before returning to the group.

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

John the Baptist, the fiery prophet who once cried out in the wilderness, is now behind prison walls. The one who boldly proclaimed, "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (Jn 1:29), is now facing his darkest hour. His question to Jesus is raw and honest: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" It's not a question of unbelief but it's the cry of a weary pilgrim battered by life's waves.

Jesus does not answer with theories or explanations. He points John to signs of hope: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (Mt 11:5). In other words, John is being told, even in prison, even when his life is rough, God is still at work.

This message beautifully connects with the third

symbol of the Jubilee logo: the waves beneath the figures. These waves are not calm or gentle. They are rough and uneven, symbolising the reality that the pilgrim path of life is often marked by hardship, struggle, and turmoil. Yet, the figures are not sinking. They are still moving forward, journeying toward Christ with hope. The waves may toss, but they do not destroy. They may shake us, but they cannot steal the promise of God's Kingdom.

To illustrate this, imagine a lighthouse during a storm. The waves crash violently, the wind howls, the night is dark but the lighthouse remains firm, its light steady, guiding sailors to shore. The lighthouse does not stop the storm; it helps people find their way through it. In the same way, Christ is our unshakable lighthouse. Advent invites us to fix our eyes not on the size of the waves but on the steadfast light of Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, God's people faced rough waters. Israel crossed the Red Sea (Ex 14), Jonah wrestled with the storm (Jon 1), Peter walked on water and began to sink when fear overtook faith (Mt 14:30). Yet each time, God's saving hand was revealed. As St. Augustine reminds us, "God does not take away the waves, but He gives us the courage to walk upon them."

John the Baptist teaches us that faith does not mean the absence of doubt or struggle. It means holding on to hope when the waves rise. Jesus' words to John are the same to us: God is still at work, even when we cannot see clearly. Gaudete Sunday is a call to rejoice, not because life is easy, but because Christ is near. Even in rough seas, hope anchors us. Even in turmoil, His light leads us home.

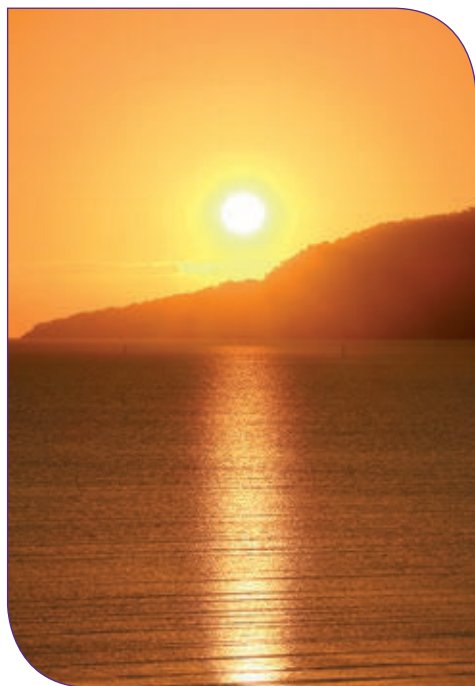
## CHECKING IN WITH MY SOUL

Who around me is facing their own “rough waters,” and what small, practical thing can I do this week to help them see the lighthouse, even if it’s just texting them a joke to make them smile?

Like John in prison, can I find a way to witness to God’s work even in my limitations, a kind word, a prayer, without feeling like I have to start a social media campaign?

Do I allow myself to truly experience joy, or am I too focused on worries, tasks, or trying to keep my inbox under control? How can I reclaim delight in small moments?

G.K. Chesterton reminds us that joy is the gigantic mark of a Christian. How can I let that



joy shine this week, so that my faith is not just something I believe, but something others can see and catch?

## PERSONAL STORY

Deacon Huy Tran

*“Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else?”* (Matthew 11:3). It is profoundly difficult to grasp the depth of John the Baptist’s despair when he sent his disciples to ask Jesus about his true identity. This question seems surprising when we consider the development of John’s relationship with Jesus in the Gospel narrative. It begins with John joyfully leaping in his mother’s womb at the presence of Jesus, who was also in His mother’s womb (Luke 1:41), and continues with him proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). One might ask why, after all the prior events, John the Baptist, at the culmination of his life, facing imprisonment and the threat of imminent death, questioned whether Jesus was truly the awaited Messiah. One would have thought that John certainly knew the answer to his own question.

Perhaps, in his hopelessness, John might have considered his life’s ministry to be in vain, since Jesus had not turned out to be the exact Messiah whom he had imagined. Jesus was associating with the poor, the suffering; he did not immediately initiate a political revolution to free his people from Roman oppression as most of the people expected; and above all, he did not condemn sinners, particularly in the case of the woman caught in adultery, but instead invited her to repent (John 8:1-11). This contrasted with John’s own fate of imprisonment because of his bold

condemnation of King Herod marrying his sister-in-law Herodias (Matthew 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19-20).

I believe that many of us have found ourselves in discouraging situations like John's and have wondered why God allows us to face them. We struggle to find the purposes of our lives and what God's will might be in the midst of our hopelessness. I too went through a somewhat similar experience, though not as severe as John's, and it left me with just a glimpse of what he must have felt.

In 2016, after completing my university studies while residing in the pre-seminary, I was required to undertake another examination to enter the Major Seminary. Having passed, I was accepted. Yet, just before the new year commenced, I was asked whether I would be willing to go to another country for the work of evangelisation. I responded that I was not particularly keen, but that if I were sent, I would go. I was chosen to go overseas to "a country" (Genesis 12:1) that the rector of the seminary, somewhat mysteriously, never disclosed to me. I anticipated that the process would take only a few months before I could depart. However, after more than a year of waiting in uncertainty, I was eventually informed that I should remain at home and join the following year's class in 2017. I felt both disappointed at the seemingly wasted waiting and grateful for the chance to remain at home. Yet only a few weeks later, I was once again asked to change my plans, this time to go to the Diocese of Broken Bay in Australia, a place which I knew nothing about. One more time, I had to wait. "One of the reasons why waiting is so difficult for us, I think, is because waiting hollows us out. Waiting empties us. In our waiting, we

realise a certain powerlessness."<sup>1</sup> Like John, I was also wondering what the Lord's will for me was, whether I would be able to follow it and if I was truly doing His will or "*must [I] wait for someone and [something] else.*"

However, in the end, it turned out to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. I was recently ordained to the Diaconate for our Diocese. Reflecting on the decade since the day I was asked if I was willing to leave my country, I can see the Lord always with me, guiding me and working for my good. My part has been to wait for Him in **HOPE** rather than fall into despair and cooperate with Him. As Jesus asks John to look at what he had done (Matthew 11:4-5), I am also invited to contemplate what the Lord has done in my life. Truly, I can say that He is the Son of God who has led me along ways that were unexpected, yet marvellously wonderful.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, source of all hope,

in moments of waiting and uncertainty,  
when doubts rise and hope feels  
distant, remind us, as You did John,  
that You are always at work, even  
when we cannot see the full path.  
Help us to trust in Your timing and to  
hold fast to hope, knowing that You  
guide us through unexpected ways  
with unwavering love. May we find  
peace in Your presence, courage in our  
waiting, and joy in the journey, so that  
our lives reflect Your light to others.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SUNDAY 21 DECEMBER 2025

## MUSIC SUGGESTION

1. Hail Mary: Gentle Woman  
– The Cathedral Singers, Richard Proulx
2. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – Matt Maher

## OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,

as we journey through this final week of Advent, help us to embrace a quiet, steadfast faith like that of St. Joseph. When life surprises us with unexpected storms, may we choose hope over fear and trust over doubt, anchoring our hearts firmly in You. Guide us to listen, obey, and grow in courage, so that in every moment, we may welcome Your presence and live as signs of Your unfailing love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

## GOSPEL READING

**Matthew 1:18-24 (NRSV)**

*A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew*

The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## IN THE SILENCE OF MY HEART

*"In the secret of my heart, teach me wisdom"  
(Psalm 51:6)*

You are invited to take 3-5 minutes to silently re-read the passage you have just heard. We encourage you to underline one or two things from the passage that stood out to you. Feel free to write down – for yourself and no one else – anything new or insightful that the Lord might have placed on your heart to ponder. No matter how plain or simple or deep or profound these thoughts may be, take one more moment to thank Jesus for His word to you before returning to the group.

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

As Advent nears its end, the Gospel leads us into the quiet and steadfast faith of St. Joseph. He receives news that shakes the foundations of his world: Mary, his betrothed, is with child through the Holy Spirit. Confusion and fear naturally follow, and you can almost imagine him muttering, *"Well, this was not on my to-do list!"*, but then comes God's message through the angel: "Do not be afraid." And Joseph, in silence and obedience, chooses hope over fear, trust over doubt. Sometimes faith means saying yes even when life has thrown you a completely unexpected plot twist.

This moment mirrors the fourth symbol of the Jubilee logo: the anchor-shaped cross at the base, descending into the waves. Since ancient times, the anchor has been a symbol of hope, firmness, and stability, especially in storms. When the wind howls and the sea rages, it is the anchor that holds the ship steady. Likewise in life's storms uncertainties, losses,

unexpected turns hope in Christ becomes the anchor of our souls.

In Joseph, we see this anchored hope in action. He does not understand everything, but he listens, trusts, and obeys. Through his faithful "yes," the Word becomes flesh, and Christ enters history. But His coming does not end there. He comes in mystery in the Sacraments, in prayer, in the faces of the poor, and in the quiet of our hearts. And He will come in majesty, to anchor the whole of creation in His eternal Kingdom. One great story of love: Christ who came, who comes, and who will come again.

The green letters at the base of the Jubilee logo carry their own message: green symbolises growth, renewal, and life. Hope is not static; it is alive, growing, moving us forward. St. Augustine once said, "Hope has two beautiful daughters: their names are Anger and Courage. anger at the way things are, and courage to ensure they do not remain the same." Hope transforms fear into movement, darkness into light.

Here's one simple imagery to understand it all: imagine a small boat in a stormy sea. The waves rise, the night is dark, and the wind is fierce. Yet the anchor is dropped deep into the seabed. The boat sways but does not drift away. The storm remains, but the anchor holds. In the same way, Christ is our anchor. Hope in Him does not remove life's storms, but it steadies us through them.

This Advent, as we prepare to celebrate Emmanuel "God with us" let us anchor our lives in Christ, the firm and unshakable foundation of our hope.



## CHECKING IN WITH MY SOUL

If Joseph could mutter, "Well, this was not on my to-do list!" how often do I find myself muttering similar things when life throws me a curveball? How can I respond with a silent "yes" instead of a dramatic sigh?

What are the "stormy seas" in my life right now, and how can I drop my anchor in Christ instead of frantically paddling in every direction?

Hope is alive and growing, like a plant that sometimes needs pruning. What is one small change I can make this week to let hope take root and flourish in my heart?



Christ comes in mystery, in prayer, in the faces of the poor. Who is someone I might anchor hope for this week, and what playful, unexpected, or slightly silly thing could I do to brighten their stormy sea?

## PERSONAL STORY

### Lea Joris, Acitivity Support Leader Catholic Care Broken Bay

In Matthew's Gospel, we meet Joseph at a moment of crisis. He learns that Mary, his betrothed, is with child, and he cannot see the way forward. Out of love, he plans to spare her shame, but God interrupts with a greater call: "Do not be afraid." Joseph chooses to trust, to love beyond fear, and in that choice, he becomes part of God's saving plan.

That invitation – do not be afraid, trust in love – has also been part of my own story. Thirty-six years ago, I gave birth to my beautiful daughter. She was born with Down syndrome, and in those first moments, I didn't know what her life, or mine, would look like. Like Joseph, I found myself standing before the unknown, with only love and trust to guide me.

From the beginning, she has been God's gift of love in my life. Through her, I have learned humility – how to let go of my own expectations and discover joy in what is simple and true. She has shown me what unconditional love looks like: a love that doesn't measure or compare, but simply delights in presence, in laughter, in shared life.

Over the years I have watched her overcome obstacles, grow in confidence, and live a full life



Joseph's quiet courage in the Gospel and the love that has grown through my own journey both point to the heart of Advent: God enters our lives in surprising ways, and if we trust Him, love will transform everything. As we wait for the coming of Christ, may we, like Joseph, chose love over fear: And may we see in our own lives the unexpected gifts of God's love – gifts that teach, shape, and draw us closer to Him.

of independence. I cannot help but be proud. Each step she has taken forward has reminded me that God's hand is steady, and His plans are filled with hope.

Looking back, I see how my daughter has been my teacher. She has taught me to love more freely, to be more patient, to see God in places I might have overlooked. I am deeply grateful that God entrusted her to me, because through her, I have glimpsed the unconditional love He has for each of us.

Joseph's quiet courage in the Gospel and the love that has grown through my own journey both point to the heart of Advent: God enters our lives in surprising ways, and if we trust Him, love will transform everything. As we wait for the coming of Christ, may we, like Joseph, choose love over fear: And may we see in our own lives the unexpected gifts of God's love – gifts that teach, shape, and draw us closer to Him.

Loving God,  
You called us, as You called Joseph,  
to trust in Your plan and to love without fear.  
We thank You for the gift of Jesus,  
Emmanuel, God with us,  
And for the ways You reveal Your love through the  
people in our lives.

Open our hearts this Advent to welcome Your surprises  
To embrace humility,  
And live in the freedom of unconditional love.  
May the example of Joseph, and the quiet teachers  
You place in our lives,  
Guide us ever closer to Your Son, our Saviour.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, source of all hope,

as we close this time of prayer and  
this Advent journey comes to an  
end, we thank You for the gift of  
trust and love that carried Joseph  
through his uncertainty. Help us to  
embrace Your invitation to "not be  
afraid," and to choose love even  
in the face of the unknown.

May we recognise Your presence in the  
unexpected teachers and blessings in  
our lives, growing in patience, humility,  
and hope. Guide us to live each  
day anchored in Your love, ready to  
welcome Emmanuel, God with us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

**Amen.**

## BONUS CHRISTMASTIDE CONTENT

Happy Christmas to you and your loved ones!

Just like major festivals of antiquity, Christmas is too big and too special a celebration to contain within a single day. In the Church's liturgy, Christmas and the seven days that follow it are all treated with the same solemnity as Christmas Day. While each day has its own Mass, the psalms for Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours (prayed by all priests and religious, as well as some lay people) remain the same throughout the Octave. We are encouraged to remember that Christmas is a season rather than a single day, and to live the Octave in that spirit.

For this reason, this year's Advent Program doesn't just cut off suddenly – you will find in the pages that follow some reflection material for each day of the Octave, for the New Year, and for Epiphany. You could get through the material in just a few minutes of private reflection each day, or it could serve as a "kick-off" prompt for a longer daily prayer time should you wish.

We hope this extra content helps you to maintain a spirit of joyful praise through the Christmas Season!

### MAKE MY HEART A MANGER: CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

There's a lot of Kingly imagery wrapped up in the Christmas package... and rightly so. Yet in the book of Wisdom, where the author writes in the persona of King Solomon recalling the

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That *our* Infant King was born into such humble circumstances and placed in a food trough for animals for lack of anywhere better to place Him should be cause for great reassurance. When we ask Him to make a home in our hearts, we needn't fear our littleness.

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day of his birth, we are reminded that even a King starts his life needing to be wrapped up in swaddling (Wis 7:4-6). When Solomon was born and wrapped in swaddling, it is a reasonable bet that he was placed somewhere much more ornate and comfortable than in a manger.

That *our* Infant King was born into such humble circumstances and placed in a food trough for animals for lack of anywhere better to place Him should be cause for great reassurance. When we ask Him to make a home in our hearts, we needn't fear our littleness. We needn't fear our poverty. He came into the world as Emmanuel, as God with us. He *wants* to be with each one of us. By inviting Him into our hearts, as little as they are, we are showing Him the hospitality that was lacking in the Bethlehem inn. There IS room in our hearts for Him. All we need do is to desire to embrace Him there and look upon Him with the love of a parent watching his or her newborn child sleeping.

Here are eight brief Christmas reflections, one for each day of the Octave. They can be used in any order you wish.

**CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 1:**

"O God, you are my God, for you I long;  
for you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you like a dry,  
weary land without water.

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary  
to see your strength and your glory."

(Psalm 63: used in Morning Prayer  
in the Christmas Octave)

Jesus, I have longed for you to come into my heart all through the Advent season, and now it is Christmas, and You are here anew! Make Yourself at home in my heart. I am delighted, grateful... touched... that You would make Your home in me. Rearrange the "furniture" and make my heart as You would like it to be. Only let me continue to delight in Your presence, Emmanuel, God with us!

**CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 2:**

The name Jesus is our anglicised form of the Greek Ἰησοῦς, (pronounced "yay-zoos")

which is a transliteration of the Hebrew יֵשׁוּעַ (pronounced "yesh-oo-ah"). The name is a shortened form of a conjunction of the Hebrew name of God (Y'hwh) and the word for saves/salvation. Jesus would have been called by the Hebrew name during His time on earth, but at the time that the Gospels were written, they were distributed most widely in Greek since that was the most universal language at the time, even moreso than the Latin that became more common in future centuries.

Jesus – my Jesus – You are the one who saves. As an infant, resting safely in my heart, it is nevertheless You who keeps me safe. You who went to the extraordinary length of becoming a child just so that we could walk together in friendship... I couldn't come to You, so You came to me to draw me close to You, close to the Father, guided by the Holy Spirit. For the next few moments, I wish to abide in the safety You have created for me, and I invite You to continue to abide in the manger of my heart.



### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 3:

*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of people. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"*  
John 1:4-5

In first century Judea, manglers were frequently carved out of the walls of caves. While biblical sources cannot confirm that Jesus was born in a cave, Emperor Constantine did establish a basilica (now called the Church of the Nativity) over the cave where Jesus is believed to have been born.

Often, our greatest lessons are learnt from breakthroughs in the 'hardened places' of our lives. These might be great suffering, trials or situations where we initially feel desolated – where we think God has abandoned us. When we invite God into these challenging spaces, we carve a new dwelling place for God to work. Just as a single flame illuminates a dark room, so has Christ's birth enlightened our world.

Lord, help us be open to transformation. Give us the courage to carve room for you in the challenging relationships, uncertain plans and tender movements of grief. We welcome You to inscribe Your name on our hearts.

### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 3:

*An invitation to Radical Hospitality:  
"There Was No Room for Them at the Inn"*

One of the hardest parts of the Christmas story is this: when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room for them. The Son of God entered the world not through open doors, but through rejection.

That moment isn't just history, it asks something of us today. What does it look like, here and now, to always make room? Real hospitality is more than polite friendliness. It's about making space, even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable. It says to others: you belong, you are not a burden, there is room for you here.

Sometimes it's as simple as noticing someone sitting alone, offering a meal, or standing alongside those who feel pushed aside, the homeless, the refugee, the lonely.

When we welcome them, we welcome Christ. And when we open the door with joy, our homes and parishes become like the manger: places where God is at home.

### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 5:

*"When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart." – Luke 2:18-19"*

One's life is shaped by what one treasures. Material gifts may provide temporal happiness in this life. However, as Christians we look towards living for the eternal promise of Heaven.

Sometimes our expression of joy is to shout from the rooftops. At other times – our joy is held as a deep appreciation within our 'inner castle'. Mary treasures that God's promise is incarnate through her son, Jesus Christ. Do I pray with an expectant heart like Mary? Do I truly trust, and rejoice when God's promises to me are fulfilled? Throughout her whole life, Mary witnessed her son live, suffer, die and resurrect – all for the glory of God.

The manger in Bethlehem wasn't much. Just a feeding trough in a cold stable. Yet that's where God chose to come.

Lord, help us to emulate Mary's radical trust in You. Give me patience to seek silence, deeply contemplate God's goodness, and celebrate God's victory in discerning ways. May my inmost being repose in God's faithfulness. Help me to treasure the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

#### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 6:

*Welcoming the Prince of Peace:  
"Make My Heart a Manger"*

The manger in Bethlehem wasn't much. Just a feeding trough in a cold stable. Yet that's where God chose to come. Peace entered the world not in a palace, but in a poor, ordinary, and overlooked place.

Christ doesn't wait for perfect conditions. He comes into the mess, the noise, the places we think unworthy. To pray, "Make my heart a manger" is to say, "Lord, come into my life as it is, unfinished, imperfect, but open to You."

The manger also reminds us to make room for others. Mary and Joseph were turned away because there was no room. Who gets turned away today; refugees, the homeless, children in poverty? If Christ came among the poor, then He still comes through the poor now.

So, let's pray: "Lord, make my heart a manger. Remove my fear, pride, and selfishness. Let Your peace be born in me and help me bring it into the world."

#### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 7:

*"The Word was made flesh, and lived among us"  
John 1:14*

Our Genesis stories tell us of the great love God poured into creation from the beginning. With the simple utterance of a word, the breath of life formed the entirety of the universe. Step by step, all things came to being. God has been with us in this great act of creative love since that moment, but in an ultimate act of lavish love, the Word himself becomes flesh. And how is that love in flesh expressed? In the form of a baby – the majesty of the creator of the universe, capable of all things, presents himself in the innocence and vulnerability of an infant child.

Let us pray in this Christmas Season that we too may present ourselves to all those we meet with the vulnerability and lavish love of our God.

#### CHRISTMAS MINI REFLECTION 8:

*Little baby... I am a poor boy too. I have no gift to bring.... that's fit to give a King.*

*Shall I play for you.... On my drum?*

As a parent, one might giggle at the words of the famous Christmas Carol, Little Drummer Boy. What mother could possibly want a small child to come into the peace and serenity of a family gathered around a new born child, and play a drum... pa rum pum pum pum!

The story told in this carol, although having no scriptural basis, is still a reflective moment for us to consider – what gifts might we have to offer our new born king? As the Christmas Octave ends and we mark the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, how might we be as gracious as Mary is portrayed, in accepting the gifts that others may offer in service to us?

## A NEW DAWN, A NEW BEGINNING IN CHRIST

As the year draws to a close, and the anticipation of a new year stirs within us, take a quiet moment in your heart to reflect upon the tapestry of blessings, grace, joys, accomplishments, challenges, hopes, and fears that have woven themselves into your life over the past year.

With a grateful heart, offer praise to the Lord for the year that has been. In moments of challenge, God has been your strength. In times of uncertainty, God has been your refuge. In joys and blessings, both great and small, God has revealed His love and His constant presence. Each day carried its own graces, its own glimmering light – even when hidden beneath burdens. For all that has been, give glory and thanks to God.

As you look back, remember that the Lord has walked with you through every step of this past year. And as you turn your gaze forward, open your heart to the hopes, faith, and trust in Jesus that will guide you in the year ahead.

The turning of the year invites us to begin anew – renewed in faith, rekindled in hope, and refreshed in love. With hearts set aflame, welcome the possibilities that lie before you. Entrust your plans, your dreams, and even your uncertainties into the hands of our loving Lord, confident in His providence and steadfast mercy. *“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire”*  
– Saint Catherine of Siena

May the year ahead hold opportunities for deeper prayer, greater compassion, and stronger faith. May you grow in holiness, walking ever more closely with Jesus. May your life shine as a witness of hope, a beacon of light, and a living affirmation of God’s greatness in a world longing for peace.

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). With Him as our companion and guide, every new beginning is filled with promise.

**Perhaps you might like to include one or more of the following in your New Year’s Eve traditions.**

### 1. Light a Candle of Thanksgiving

- Place a candle in a quiet space and recall the blessings of the past year. Offer your prayer of gratitude as the flame burns, symbolising Christ’s light that guided you.

### 2. Scripture Reflection

- Read a passage of hope and trust, such as *Isaiah 43:18–19* (“See, I am doing a new thing”) or *Jeremiah 29:11* (“I know the plans I have for you...”). Reflect on how God has worked in your life and what He may be calling you to in the year ahead.

### 3. Examination of the Year

In the stillness of your heart, review the year gone by:

- Where did I feel closest to God?
- When did I struggle to trust Him?
- Where do I see His blessings most clearly?

End with an Act of Contrition and a prayer for grace in the new year.

### 4. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Encounter the Infinite mercy of Jesus, an opportunity to begin the year afresh. Let the grace of forgiveness be the first gift you give yourself in the new year.

### 5. Blessing of Your Home

- Pray together over your home, asking the Lord to fill it with peace, joy, and protection in the new year.

### 6. Midnight Prayer

- Pause at midnight for a moment of silence and prayer before God. Begin the year by making the Sign of the Cross, entrusting the next twelve months to His care.

### 7. Pray the Te Deum

- The Church encourages the faithful to pray the Te Deum on New Year's Eve, a hymn of thanksgiving praising God for His goodness and providence.

### 8. Choose a Word or Virtue for the Year

- In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you with a guiding word, scripture verse, or virtue (such as patience, hope, trust, or charity) to carry into the new year.

### 9. Eucharistic Adoration or Mass

- If possible, attend a Vigil Mass for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1st), or spend time in adoration to begin the year in Christ's presence.

### 10. Kindle a new friendship

- Choose a Saint who resonates with your heart, whose life reflects virtues you hope to grow in. Let their example illuminate your path throughout the coming year, and through their inspiration, inspire your journey closer to Jesus.



# MAJESTY REVEALED: EPIPHANY

*“God from God, Light from Light”  
(Nicene Creed)*

*“The light shines in the darkness, and  
the darkness has not overcome it...  
The true light that enlightens every  
man was coming into the world...  
Word of God became flesh and dwelt  
among us, and we saw his glory.”*

(Jn 1:5, 9, 14)

**T**he majority of the Christmas Season invites us to focus on how God became Man, how He became one of us at a certain point in history and how He wishes to be close to us, His created ones, for all eternity. Without in any way minimising this beautiful truth, our attention is shifted in the later portion of the Christmas Season to Jesus' Divine Nature. Yes – Jesus is one of us... and He remains God.

This too is part of that Good News that the Angels proclaimed to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. In the Church's cycle of feasts and related Gospel Readings, there are three special feasts or epiphanies that we find clustered together at the start of the year. The first of these is Epiphany, followed closely by the Baptism of the Lord, and the Wedding at Cana. These three events are grouped together liturgically because they serve a special purpose: they manifest the Lord's divinity and reveal explicitly Jesus' relationship to the Father as His Son.

There is a twofold “Majesty” at play here. Jesus

is the fulfillment of all of the promises to the chosen people and the biological heir to the Kingship of David, but as the Son of God He is also the King of Kings, the King of Heaven and Earth, who will one day return to judge the living and the dead.

If you're feeling a bit like these truths about Jesus are a little harder to make sense of than the Baby in the Manger we have been celebrating this Christmas Season, don't be disheartened! This is one of the beautiful **mysteries** of our faith and we aren't expected to be able to understand it entirely! We accept it because it was revealed through the events themselves, as recounted to us in the Gospels, and as unpacked for us through the teaching of the Church. We are invited to reflect upon it in the silence and wonder of our hearts without needing to understand.

We could spend a lifetime contemplating (and/or studying) the **mystery** of Jesus who is fully God and fully human – two natures embodied in one person – but there are also some very practical considerations available to us specifically in the Gospel account of Epiphany.

**Jesus came to us...  
... we need to come to Him!**

The three wise men travelled a great distance, recognising that the promises in the ancient texts were being fulfilled, and going out to seek Him. When they found Him, they bowed before Him and offered gifts. Jesus came to us, yes, but He hopes that, whatever our path in life, we will



come to Him, too. *What might this look like in your life?*

**Jesus' coming changes things... changes US... having encountered Him, we are invited to depart "by another way"**

The three wise men were cautioned to return to their lands by another way since Herod, whom they had encountered on their way to Bethlehem, wished to harm Jesus. After their encounter with Jesus, their allegiance was not to Herod, but to Him. They left, changed. *Each*

*time we encounter Jesus in prayer, or in the Eucharist, do we let Him change us? Ask Him to show you the "different way" by which you can set out in your life today.*

**Jesus is the light that conquers the darkness**

In the hardest times in our lives – His presence makes a difference. If we sincerely turn to Him during dark or painful times, His light can bring healing and comfort. *When times are tough – now or in the future – how might I turn to Jesus, the Light, in my own life?*

#### FOOTNOTE

- 1 David Ranson, *Second Sunday of Advent Year B*, December 8, 2023, <https://davidranson.com.au/uncategorised/2023/12/08/second-sunday-of-advent-10-december-2023/>.



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