

Presence

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
DAILY REFLECTIONS 2026

Contents



1st week of Advent
29 NOVEMBER–5 DECEMBER 2026 4



2nd week of Advent
6 DECEMBER–12 DECEMBER 2026 14



3rd week of Advent
13 DECEMBER–19 DECEMBER 2026 26



4th week of Advent
20 DECEMBER–24 DECEMBER 2026 36



Christmas
25 DECEMBER–26 DECEMBER 2026 46



The Holy Family
27 DECEMBER 2026–2 JANUARY 2027 52



The Epiphany
3 JANUARY–9 JANUARY 2027 63




Christmas



The Adoration of the Shepherds (c. 1534)

LORENZO LOTTO (1480–1556)

Oil on canvas, 147cm x 166cm.
Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia, Lombardy, Italy. Public Domain.

Our wait is over and our Advent cry, "Come, Lord," has been answered with a Baby's cry. Now it is God who waits—waits for us to come to this Child who shows us that God is not just a concept, but a Person now present among us, "Having taken to himself our humanity to grant us a share in his divinity" (*Collect*, 17 December).

Laid in an animal's feeding trough, this Child will later declare, "I am the Bread of Life. Eat it and you will never die" (Jn 6:48–50). God's power allows him to become small. As Mary could grasp the Eternal God in her arms, so we can grasp him with open hands at Communion. God empties himself so that we can be filled. "God is so good that he can give up his divine splendour and come down to a stable, so that we might find him" (Benedict XVI, *Midnight Mass* 2005).

The Roman world was at peace the night Christ was born. It is not so for the world tonight. 2,000 years later the Middle East is still engulfed in horrific evil. In a world that has largely forgotten God, evil rears its ugly head. We can never have both—it is always one or the other. But come again God does, he will never give up. On our altars tonight, and on all the altars of the world, God will come to earth, issuing the same invitation: "Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest. Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:28–29).

Although Luke places Christ's birth in a definite period of political history, his concern is the moment of salvation history—God's time—which had come when a woman was prepared to completely give herself into God's hands.

God always becomes incarnate when we surrender our lives to his.

Luke sets the birth of Jesus in the world of the Emperor Augustus to declare that it was not the emperor who was the peacemaker, as some of the inscriptions on his monuments proclaimed. Rather, the peacemaker is this powerless Child—if the world accepts him. John would later lament, "He came unto his own, and his own would not accept him" (Jn 1:11). But if we would allow him to be born in the manger of our hearts then we, too, can become peacemakers in our own small world. Peace always begins with me—and then, as Edward Kennedy eulogised at the funeral of his brother Robert, I am like a stone thrown into a pond, creating a ripple which widens until it reaches the very edges.

To leave Mass today, having refused his offer of peace, is to remain with the wrapping and the tinsel of Christmas while missing the Gift himself.

Lorenzo Lotto, born in Venice about 1480, is known for his distinctive style. His paintings focused not just on idealised beauty, but the inner life of his subjects. Look at the characters in his *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. Mary kneels to the left, her hands joined in prayer, her head bowed in quiet adoration. Her gaze is fixed entirely on the Child before her. The Christ Child lies on a simple bed of straw, a gentle light falling on him. Lotto's most striking detail is the lamb brought forward by a shepherd; it leans towards the Child. The lamb seems to be interacting with the Child, as if it knows the Child's identity as the true Lamb of God and his future sacrifice (the subject of this booklet's cover).

The shepherds' clothing suggests that they are just ordinary people, the people the Child will mix with in later life. Joseph looks over Mary's shoulder, his presence calm and protective. Angels quietly observe the scene, showing that two realities are intermingling—the earthly and the heavenly. God enters the world not in splendour but in vulnerability.

MONS GRAHAM SCHMITZER

Isaiah 63:16–17; 64:1. 3–8
Psalm 79:2–3. 15–16. 18–19. R. v.4
1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Mark 13:33–37

29 NOVEMBER 2026
First Sunday of Advent

Stay awake! MK 13:37

We see much and notice little. There is a profound difference between looking at the world for its utility and truly seeing it with wonder. John Ruskin taught drawing, not so that people would produce beautiful art, but so that they would learn to really *see*. Drawing a tree in bloom is different from merely admiring it; it pulls you into the present and teaches you to notice the smallest details.

French philosopher Simone Weil argued that this sort of attention fosters faith and love, and at its deepest level, attention becomes prayer. It means slowing down long enough to receive what is before us rather than trying to master it. When Jesus commands us to "stay awake", he is calling us to a deeper kind of vigilance: not a frantic fear of the future, but calm and single-minded attention to the present.

God comes quietly—through the sacraments, Scripture, silence, interruptions, neighbours, and the beauty of creation. But endless stimulation and activity leaves us restless and empty. All that noise makes us spiritually drowsy. The remedy is loving attention, ready for the Lord who comes quietly in grace and will come suddenly in glory.

Come, Lord Jesus. Find us watching, hearts open and attentive to your presence. Amen.

FR JOHN CORRIGAN

2 DECEMBER 2026
Wednesday of the first week of Advent

Isaiah 25:6–10
Psalm 22. R. v.6
Matthew 15:29–37

You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. PS 22:5

For good reason, Psalm 22 is the popular choice for funerals. The vivid and comforting imagery of the hymn speaks to the heart of mourners who long for their loved ones—and ultimately themselves—to be at peace in the idyllic green pastures described by the author.

There is, however, one sentence lurking midway through the psalm, which threatens the tranquillity of the scene. "You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes." This one sentence led author C.S. Lewis to call out the psalmist for bringing a spirit of hatred to the reader, and to label his triumphant mocking of his adversaries while he supped with the Lord as "petty" and "vulgar". I suspect, though, that it is the translation into English of "foes" which is the true offender.

The Hebrew text uses a word which means "that which binds us and causes us distress". Let us reimagine Lewis' scene of conceited prosperity and instead picture Jesus as he places himself between us and that which chokes the life from us. Calmly and intentionally, he prepares a bountiful meal before you, untroubled by the presence of the enemy. His power is not used to eliminate the darkness, but rather to meet you face to face in the midst of your difficulty and to see you through it.

Lord Jesus, you are my shepherd, help me to see your light when I am surrounded by darkness. Amen.

FIONA BRADLEY

4 DECEMBER 2026
Friday of the first week of Advent

Isaiah 29:17–24
Psalm 26:1. 4. 13–14. R. v.1
Matthew 9:27–31

Two blind men followed him shouting, "Take pity on us, Son of David." MT 9:27

The Holy Spirit's inspiration has put into words the tremendous ache of our hearts: to grasp, to taste, to hear, to see, in the full light of day, what our faith reaches out towards in our present darkness—the face of the Lord.

Matthew's Gospel goes so far as to duplicate the blind man's experience with, not only one, but two blind men following Jesus, shouting out for his mercy.

This Advent season of hope is a great blessing. The Scriptures turn us around to face ourselves squarely and admit the raw longing for God that lies within us. They promise us that our daily experience of the barrenness of our land, the seeming victory of wickedness and the suffering of the lowly is for "a short time, a very short time" (Is 29:17). Today's readings are filled with the assurance of God's love, presence and power. Scanning them, we find that the Lord will speak, bring light, do wonders in our midst, let us savour his sweetness, touch us, and open our eyes to see his loving gaze upon us.

So, if you feel like one of the blind men stumbling along in your journey behind Jesus, keep shouting, keep believing, and be sure that if the one thing we want of the Lord is to live in his house, we will indeed see his goodness in the land of the living.

Lord, help us to hold firm, take heart and hope in you, trusting that your light will overcome every darkness and your goodness will never fail us. Amen.

SR MARY HELEN HILL OP

2 Samuel 7:1–5. 8–12. 14. 16
Psalm 88:2–5. 27. 29. R. see v.2
Romans 16:25–27
Luke 1:26–38

20 DECEMBER 2026
Fourth Sunday of Advent

But how can this come about, since I am a virgin? LK 1:34

When Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the absence of a human father is not meant to be seen as a rejection of fatherhood. Similarly, the virginity of Mary is not meant to lead us into a negative attitude towards human sexuality, love, and physical intimacy within marriage. The link between Mary's virginity and her purity and innocence is not intended to suggest that the gift of marital intimacy is something dirty and sinful. After all, God blessed man and woman with the words, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:28).

The belief that Mary conceived as a virgin, without the involvement of a human father, reveals to us that God directly intervened in order to bring about the Incarnation, the conception of Christ within her (*CCC* 503). The virginal conception is a sign for us that Jesus Christ is truly Son of God (*CCC* 496). In being the eternal Son of God the Father—who assumed our human nature, taking to himself flesh and blood in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary—Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human. He is the human face of God, and the divine face of humanity. In him, the divine nature and the human nature have come together as one—what the Church refers to as the hypostatic union (*CCC* 479–483). In other words, the virginal conception reveals to us that Jesus Christ is the Emmanuel, a name which means, "God with us" (Mt 1:23).

And so, there is nothing negative intended by Mary's virginity, and the virginal conception of Christ. It simply reveals to us that, in Christ, God is truly present among us.

May I see in Jesus Christ the presence of God. Amen.

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

21 DECEMBER 2026
21 December

Song of Songs 2:8–14
Psalm 32:2–3. 11–12. 20–21. R. vv1. 3
Luke 1:39–45

Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled. LK 1:45

As Advent draws to its final days, Elizabeth's words to Mary remind us that faith begins with trust in a promise. Mary had received extraordinary news from the angel, news that would change the course of her life and the life of the world. Yet, she did not fully know how everything would unfold. What she did know was that God could be trusted. Elizabeth recognises this faith in Mary and calls her blessed, not simply because she will give birth to Jesus, but because she believed that God's promise would be fulfilled.

When I chose Elizabeth as my Confirmation name, it was because of her ability to recognise God at work. In this moment of the Gospel, Elizabeth sees what others cannot yet see. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she recognises the presence of Christ and speaks words of encouragement and blessing over Mary. During Advent, we are invited to do the same: to recognise the quiet ways God is present in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

As we come closer to Christmas Day, Elizabeth reminds us that faith helps us see with hope and joy the promises God is bringing to life among us.

Faithful God, open our hearts to recognise your presence and trust in the promises you fulfil through Christ. Amen.

KIMBERLEY LOGUE

25 DECEMBER 2026
The Nativity of the Lord

Isaiah 52:7–10
Psalm 97:1–6. R. v.3
Hebrews 1:1–6
John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word. JN 1:1

The readings for Christmas Day draw us into a profound awareness of God's presence—not distant or abstract, but immediate, living and deeply personal. While they do not recount the familiar story of Bethlehem, they reveal its deepest meaning: "God with us" (Mt 1:23).

The prophet Isaiah announces peace with the joyful proclamation, "Your God is king!" (Is 52:7). This is not simply a statement about authority, but about closeness. God is no longer hidden away, but comes to his people, restoring hope and revealing himself openly.

The letter to the Hebrews deepens this vision. God, who once spoke in many and varied ways through the prophets, has now spoken fully in his Son. To encounter Christ is to encounter God. The divine presence is no longer mediated through signs alone, but made visible and personal.

This truth reaches its fullness in the Prologue of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word … and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). The Word is eternal, the source of life and light. Yet the astonishing claim follows: "The Word was made flesh; he lived among us" (Jn 1:14). God's presence is no longer confined to Temple or symbol, but takes on our humanity. God shares our condition, our vulnerability and our life.

Yet, John reminds us that this presence can still be rejected. "He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). But to all who receive him, he gives the gift of becoming children of God.

Christmas invites us to recognise God's presence among us and to welcome Christ, so that his light may truly dwell within our hearts.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise your presence, welcome you with open hearts, and reflect your light to the world. Amen.

BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD

God is Love. 1 JN 4:8

Citing God's benevolence, John uses the word "love" nine times in today's epistle. Among those is the clause, "God is love." Often, this reality can be reduced to a trite cliché. Yes, God is love, but his love is not some vague, fuzzy or intangible notion. The Lord's love is weighty, grounded, and real.

In today's Gospel, Mark details God's love through the actions of the Son. The evangelist describes a large crowd as "sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, takes pity on the people and begins offering instruction. Afterwards, the crowd had a tangible need: hunger. The disciples were concerned with how five loaves and two fish could satiate a crowd of 5,000. Yet, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, said a blessing, and broke the loaves. He handed the bread to his disciples who fed the teeming masses in abundance.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, "The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist" (*CCC* 1335). God reveals his love for us in a particular way in the Eucharist, where Jesus is present in his body, blood, soul and divinity. Through this divine gift, the Lord offers us a superabundance of graces to satiate our spiritual hunger and provide food for our journey. God, indeed, is love.

Lord, increase my belief in your Real Presence this Christmas season and beyond. Amen.

MATTHEW OCKINGA