

WALKING TO
bethlehem

ADVENT SPIRITUAL PACKAGE

WEEK 2; PEACE



**“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”**

MARK 1:3



Gospel Reading

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

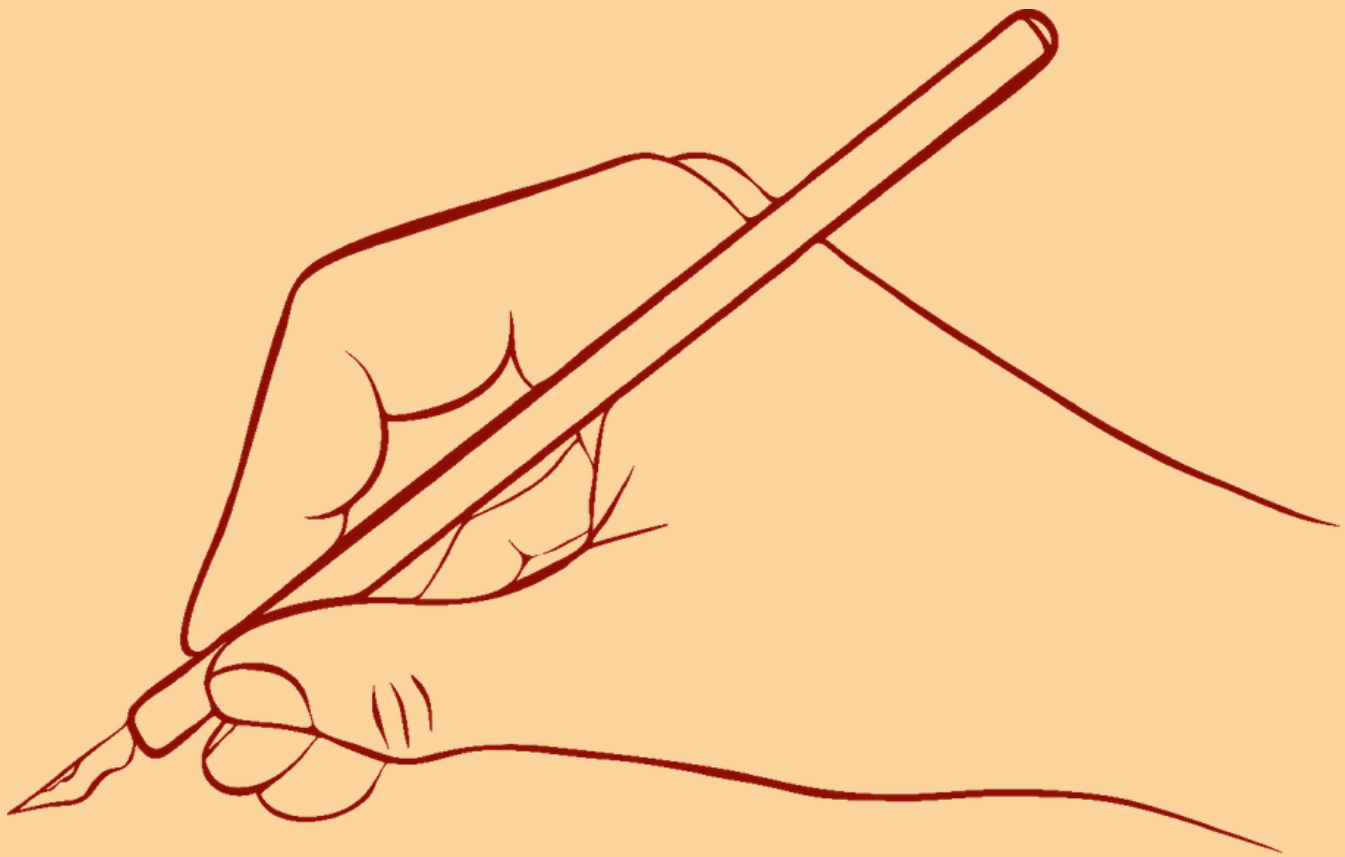
Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

Gospel Reading

All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins

John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'



reflection

Reflection

I prepared so hard for this reflection - I chose soothing praise and worship, lit a candle, put up the youtube livestream of the Blessed Sacrament on a separate screen, compared different translations of the gospel passage, and still the words didn't come. After a few days of repeating this routine, I grudgingly admitted that it might be because I'm trying to write about "Peace" - the theme of the second Sunday of Advent - when I have none.

It's difficult to have peace during a pandemic, I suppose. But to be honest, I know it's everything else in my never-ending to-do list revolving around work, community, prayer, household chores, preparing for milestone changes and recently-added Christmas shopping that's been robbing me of peace.

Reflection

I know I lack peace because I have been grasping instead of trusting; I have been trying to get things done by my own effort, to make things happen in the way and in the timeline I want them to, rather than surrendering these to God. But thankfully the beauty of this gospel is not lost to me - especially in that voice that cries out from the desert, the wilderness.

The wilderness is no stranger to many of us; whether it is the desert of an unanswered prayer, of heartbreak or grief, of desolation or spiritual dryness, all of us find ourselves in the desert at some point. Knowing how harsh the desert can be, I can't help but marvel at how this voice is still able to cry out that the Lord is coming! It is good news after all, but in my self-obsessed worry I nearly miss out on the joy that the Lord has for me.

Reflection

Ironically, this is also precisely the kind of good news my anxious soul needs to hear: God is coming to me - I don't have to make those leaps and bounds to cover all that distance that seems to have grown between God and myself. I don't have to have everything together in order to want to welcome baby Jesus in my life again.

As Dorothy Day said "Because my soul is so much like a stable. It is poor and in unsatisfactory condition because of guilt, falsehoods, inadequacies and sin. Yet I believe that if Jesus can be born in a stable, maybe he can also be born in me."



watch and pray

watch and pray

The Examen

The examen is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It is a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has 5 steps, which can be taken in order, and usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day.

Music:

Before you begin, you may want to *click on the Spotify icon below to listen to our Advent playlist. Let the music help you to enter into this time of reflection.*

Step 1: Ask God for light

I want to look at my day with god's eyes, not merely my own.

Step 2: Give thanks

The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.

Step 3: Review the day

I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.

Step 4: Face your shortcomings

I face up to what is wrong - in my life and in me.

Step 5: Look toward the day to come

I ask where I need God in the day to come.





call to action

Call to action

Brothers and sisters, perhaps you too have been feeling this same unsettling tension that comes from the lack of surrender to Jesus; or maybe you too have been absorbed in the hustle and bustle of a year that felt like it would last forever but also seemed to rush by us.

This Advent, let's try to be like this messenger - especially in our deserts. Let's give our worries a rest and stop looking at where we are or what we need but instead start to look outside of ourselves and around us. There have been many points in my life when I have felt stuck or consumed in my own pain, anxieties or insecurities, and God's way of healing me has repeatedly been the call to look outward, to others instead of at myself.

Therefore, I'm suggesting these two corporal works of mercy for us to try out this Advent:

1. Feeding the Hungry
2. Comforting the Sick

Call to action

Feeding the Hungry

I'm encouraging all to think beyond physical hunger and sickness - for we live in a world that is also very much spiritually starved and ailing. I'm guilty of thinking to myself during busy or difficult times that I have no capacity to evangelize, to bring the good news to others - even to my loved ones whom I know might be especially cynical of anything remotely related to Jesus. But if I know that every heart's true longing is only ultimately satisfied by God, and I have been so blessed to have been given this good news, how could I leave someone else to starve?

As messengers who bring the good news to the poor, pray about a loved one who has yet to encounter Jesus. If you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you, you might invite them to (virtual) mass with you or ask if they are comfortable with you sharing a short testimony with them. Do not be afraid of not knowing all the answers to their questions!

Call to action

Comforting the Sick

It is a testament to how rich our Catholic theology is that not all of it can be so simply grasped. [But please do endeavour to find a satisfactory and true answer for both yourself and your loved one.]

The festive season can be particularly painful and lonely for those who are struggling through trials or have experienced loss around this time of year. While it is good to be mindful of these, the Lord also calls us to reach out to them in the first reading in Isaiah 40:1 “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”

Sometimes spreading the festive cheer is not always about loudly blasting “All I Want for Christmas is You” by Mariah Carey; sometimes festive cheer looks more like soft smiles and quiet hope that can be found in gentle conversations and praying for each other.

Call to action

Comforting the Sick

Try to make an appointment or phone/video call with someone who you know might need a listening ear or an honest no-judgement check-in. Pray beforehand for the grace to be open and patient and that the Holy Spirit may guide your conversation and actions. If both of you are comfortable and in an appropriate setting, you might feel prompted to pray for them out loud.

It might feel intimidating and awkward at first, but God is faithful and with you always! Continue to keep them in prayer and share with them any messages or images the Lord may have for them.

It's also okay if you are the one who feels sick and in need of comfort. It's okay to be the one to ask for help. Alternatively, book a timeslot for yourself and sit with Jesus. He is the ultimate healer and He desires for you to be whole.



checkpoint

Checkpoint

As a checkpoint for this week, have some quiet time with Jesus! Every one of us desperately needs time away from the noisy and premature celebration of Christmas in a world that sadly has no patience for Advent - a season of longing and waiting for our Messiah to be born again into our lives. I can recommend this guide by Lauren Winter (you can find her on Instagram as *@brickhouseinthecity*) to help focus your thoughts and to make sure you cover some essentials:

6 Questions to ask yourself during prayer



How am I feeling?



What would bring me peace?



What should I let go of?



What bring me closer to God?



What am I proud of?



What am I not letting God into?

Journey Checkpoints

