

The Little Blue Book
Advent and Christmas Seasons
2022-2023

Six-minute reflections
on the First Readings for daily Mass
during the Advent/Christmas season

*This book is dedicated to
Bishop Ken Untener
(1937-2004)
who was inspired to create
the Little Books. His life and faith
continue to be their driving force.*

This Advent booklet is based upon the writings of Bishop Ken Untener, and put together by Catherine Haven, editor of the *Little Books*, with the assistance of Sr. Nancy Ayotte, IHM.

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How to use the *Little Blue Book*

Each 24-hour day has 1,440 minutes.

You're asked to give six of those 1,440 minutes to prayer for the next 43 days.

You can give more than six minutes if you wish. But the main thing is to pray every day.

People who pray regularly will tell you that it works best if you do it at a set time every day. The key is to make it part of your schedule, not something you try to squeeze in whenever. It can vary at times, but you need a basic pattern. You can't simply say, "I'll do it when I get a chance."

This *Little Book* will be your companion, and you can take it with you wherever you wish. You can write in it, tear out a page and put it in your pocket, get extra copies and mail them to friends or family members and have a sense of praying with them each day.

The left-hand page is like a buffet table with a variety of thoughts about the Advent and Christmas seasons, the feast of the day, or various traditions and customs.

The key is the right-hand page where we'll reflect on the first reading assigned for the Mass each day. This will give many people a chance to reflect on and pray passages that they may have seldom heard proclaimed or preached about at liturgy.

On the first Sunday of Advent,
we begin our program of 'six minutes a day.'



Advent/Christmas plans

Spend today's six minutes with the Lord sketching below some ideas on how you can spend these 28 days of Advent well. Your plans can include items that are *spiritual* (deciding where and when you will pray each day) . . . *practical* (your gift list) . . . *personal* (sending a Christmas card to someone with whom you've not been on good terms) . . . *charitable* (doing something for the poor) . . .

[Before you write anything, spend a few quiet moments with the Lord and ask for help.]

November 27 is the earliest day on which the First Sunday of Advent can fall, while December 3 is the latest.



God comes into the world

He shall judge between the nations and shall impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. (Is 2:1-5)

The prophet Isaiah dreamed of a day when Jerusalem (sometimes called Zion) would be the center of the world and all people would go there to receive God's wisdom.

In today's reading, he presents a vision of peace and prosperity for the whole world.

During the Advent season, the Church calls me to re-vive my awareness that God has come into this world. This is what I celebrate at Christmas. The Lord Jesus continues to come every day into my life. If I open my eyes to that coming, I see each day differently.

I also need to remember that the Lord will come at the end of time. Or, for each of us, in death. If I open my eyes to that reality, I see life differently.

God has come into our world through the birth of Jesus, and everything is different because of that coming. But sometimes it doesn't click with me.

I'm a disciple of God, and, like all people of God, I am called, day in and day out, to do the good things that are within my capacity to do.

I wonder what the Lord is calling me to do right now?

Today the Church lights the first
of four candles on the Advent wreath.
Perhaps you will want to light a candle too.



Mount Zion

In today's passage on the right-hand side, the prophet Isaiah (who preached during a time of political upheaval, eighth century B.C.) foresees a day when God will gather on Mount Zion all people of the world for a great banquet. Fine food, choice wine, good company – all are symbols of God's gifts.

* * *

Mount Zion came to symbolize the Promised Land for the Jewish people. It is believed to be the site of the traditional burial place of King David, and of the Upper Room where Jesus and his apostles celebrated the Last Supper.

The chapter and verse references for the Gospel passages on the right-hand pages cite the entire passage assigned for the Mass each day, not simply the excerpt at the top of the page.

On that day, the branch of the Lord will be beauty and glory, and the fruit of the land will be honor and splendor for the survivors of Israel. Everyone who remains in Zion, everyone left in Jerusalem will be called holy: everyone inscribed for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord washes away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purges Jerusalem's blood from her midst with a blast of judgment, a searing blast, then will the Lord create, over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her place of assembly, a smoking cloud by day and a light of flaming fire by night. For over all, his glory will be shelter and protection: shade from the parching heat of day, refuge and cover from storm and rain. (Is 4:2-6)

Perseverance is sustaining an effort until you reach a goal. Children's literature, like "The Little Engine that Could," helps to teach kids perseverance. They learn to try and try again until they reach their goal.

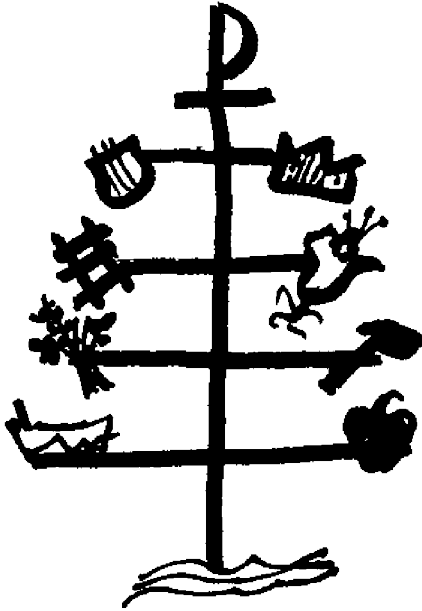
But perseverance is hard when I know I'm not going to reach my goal during my lifetime. To persevere and try to build peace in the world and *know* that when I die, there will still be war. To persevere in trying to become the kind of person I know God made me to be and to realize that I will *never* be that person until God wonderfully transforms me through death.

That kind of perseverance – a conscious hope, even though I'm not going to reach my goal in my lifetime – is the kind of perseverance Isaiah described in this reading. He'd never live to see the Jerusalem God promised, but he always believed.

That's the kind of perseverance that every Christian needs.

*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*





'A shoot will sprout
from the stump
of Jesse, and
from his roots a bud
shall blossom.'

– Is 11:1

Tree of Jesse

Jesse was the father of King David, an early ancestor of Jesus. He was the son of Obed and the grandson of Ruth, and he was from Bethlehem.

This relationship between Jesse and Jesus intrigued Church artists throughout the years, particularly since the 11th century. One popular image was a tree growing from a reclining figure of Jesse. Each branch represented members of Jesus' family tree, such as David (symbolized by a harp), Jacob (ladder), Solomon (crown), Mary (lily), and Joseph (hammer or saw).

At the top of the tree was the figure of Jesus.

The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them . . . On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious. (Is 11:1-10)

Jesse is the name of King David's father.

Since the Messiah was to come from the line of kings of Israel, and since David was one of the earliest kings, sometimes it's said that the Messiah would be of the root of Jesse, or from the stump of Jesse – the Messiah would come from whatever was left of the royal line.

The royal line of Israel had ended up a mess. Saul (the first king) had died insane. The reign of David (the next king) started with great promise but ended in personal tragedy and failure. Next was Solomon who had a powerful and glorious reign but who was not a holy person. Then there were unworthy kings, a civil war splitting the north and south, military losses. It was out of that messy history that the Messiah was to come.

This history teaches me something about God's plan to save us. No matter how tangled my life may be, God can bring something good out of that mess.

That is the way of the Lord, and that is the truth conveyed by the symbolism of the root of Jesse.

*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*





Advent wreath

Many families and parishes celebrate the start of this season by lighting the first of four candles on their Advent wreath.

Over the years, a popular practice has developed of naming each candle. For instance, the first candle (which was lit last Sunday) is called the *prophet's candle* and symbolizes hope. "Prophet" refers to Isaiah who foresaw the coming of the Messiah.

Next week's candle is called the *Bethlehem candle*, and symbolizes faith or preparation, as people prepare for the coming of Jesus.

The candle lit for the third Sunday of Advent is the *shepherd's candle*, and symbolizes the joy which the angels proclaimed when Jesus was born.

The fourth candle in the Advent wreath is called the *angel's candle* and symbolizes peace or the love for which Jesus came to earth.

In recent years, some parishes have added a fifth candle, which is lit on Christmas Eve. This white candle is known as *Christ's candle*.

Take another look at the Advent plans sketched last Sunday.