

**An Advent Retreat with Mary:
The Annunciation, the Visitation, Christmas, and the Epiphany**

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1. The Annunciation

The Annunciation to Mary

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, *of the house of David*; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!*" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and *you shall call his name Jesus* (Hebrew, *Yehoshua* 'the LORD Saves").

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:26-33)

The Promise to King David: A Future Son

[T]he word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David... I will make for you a great name... When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:4-5, 9, 12-4, 16)

What Was Mary Waiting For?

- 1000 B.C. God Promises King David his "Kingdom" Will Last "Forever"
- 922 B.C. King Solomon Dies, Kingdom Splits in Two
 - 1. Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 Tribes)
 - 2. Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Tribes)
- 722 B.C. Assyrian Exile: 10 Northern Tribes scattered among Gentiles
- 587 B.C. Babylonian Exile: 2 Southern Tribes Exiled; Jerusalem Temple Destroyed

The Destruction of the Temple and the Murder of the Royal Family

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it... Then they captured the king [Zedekiah], and brought him up to the king of Babylon..., who passed sentence upon him. They slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and took him to Babylon. In the fifth month, [the Babylonians] burned the house of the Lord... [and] broke down the walls around Jerusalem. And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile. (2 Kings 25:5-11)

The Genealogy of Jesus

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David... David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam... [lists 12 more kings], and *Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.* (Matthew 1:1-16)

The Virginal Conception of Jesus

And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” (Greek, *andra ou ginosko*, “since I know not man”) And the angel said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.* And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” And Mary said, “*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*” And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

The Book of Isaiah: the “Immanuel” Prophecies

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name *Immanuel* (Hebrew “God With Us”) (Isaiah 7:10-14)

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.” Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The Nicene Creed

We believe in *one Lord, Jesus Christ*,
the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation *he came down from heaven:*

and by the power of the Holy Spirit
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

1. The Annunciation: Questions for Reflection

1. *Through the Eyes of Mary:* As a Jewish woman, Mary would have been waiting for the coming of Messiah, the heir to the throne of David. Imagine yourself in her place at the Annunciation. How would you have reacted? What would your response to Gabriel have been?

2. *In the Heart of Mary:* as a Jewish woman, Mary would have known that because of the destruction of David's kingdom, it seemed that the promises of God had failed. Think back on your own life. Have you ever experienced disappointment so deep that it seemed as if God had abandoned you? Talk to Mary about it, and ask her to bring your sorrow to Jesus.

3. *With St. Joseph:* The Genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 shows that Joseph was actually a member of the royal family! And yet he was struggling as a poor carpenter. Have you ever felt that life has dealt you a 'bad hand' and that you aren't where you're supposed to be? Talk to St. Joseph about it, and ask him to bring your pain to Jesus the King.

4. *With the Mind of the Church:* Take some time to reread the lines of the Nicene Creed slowly and meditate on what it means to say we believe that the divine Son "came down from heaven" and "by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the virgin Mary."

Resources for Further Study

1. Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Advent* (Audio CD, DVD)
2. John Bergsma, *Bible Basics for Catholics* (Book)
3. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part 1, on the Creed)

2. The Visitation

The Visitation to Elizabeth

In those days *Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit* and she exclaimed with a loud cry, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 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 fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”* (Luke 1:39-45)

The Ark of the Covenant

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel... They shall make an ark of acacia wood... And you shall overlay it with pure gold... And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you... And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat... *There I will meet with you*, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, *I will speak with you..* (Exodus 25:1-2, 10-22)

King David Brings the Ark Up to Jerusalem

And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. And they carried the ark of God upon a new cart... And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God... And David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” So David was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David; but David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household. And it was told King David, “The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David with rejoicing... (2 Samuel 6:2-12)

The Destruction of Jerusalem: the Lost Ark of the Covenant

It was also in the writing that the prophet [Jeremiah]... ordered that the tabernacle and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: *“The place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses...”* (2 Maccabees 2:4-8)

The Location of the Ark Revealed

The Ark of the Old Covenant

The glory of the Lord and the cloud cover the Tabernacle (containing the Ark) and *“overshadow”* (*episkiazen*) them (Exod 40:34-35, cf. v. 3)

David *“arose and went”* to the hill country of *Judah* to bring up *“the ark of God”* (2 Samuel 6:2)

David admits his unworthiness to receive the Ark by exclaiming: *“How can the ark of the Lord come to me?”* (2 Samuel 6:9)

David *“leaped”* before the Ark as it was brought in *“with shouting”* (2 Samuel 6:15-16)

The Ark remained in the hill country, in the house of Obed-Edom, for *“three months”* (2 Samuel 6:11)

Mary (Ark of the New Covenant)

The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary and the power of the Most High *“overshadows”* (*episkiasei*) her (Luke 1:35)

Mary *“arose and went”* into the hill country of *Judah* to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1:39)

Elizabeth admits her unworthiness to receive Mary by exclaiming: *“And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* (Luke 1:43)

John *“leapt”* in Elizabeth’s womb at the sound of Mary’s voice and Elizabeth cried *“with a loud shout”*: (Luke 1:41-42)

Mary remained in the hill country, in Elizabeth’s house, *“three months”* (Luke 1:56)

What Was Inside the Ark of the Covenant?

1. The Ten Commandments: Word of God
2. The Manna: Bread from Heaven
3. The Rod of Aaron: Priesthood (see Hebrews 9:4)

The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, Full of Grace,
the Lord is with thee...

Gabriel:

Hail, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee...
(Luke 1:28)

Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb...

Elizabeth:

Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
(Luke 1:42)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen

The Catechism on Mary as the Ark

Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. (CCC 2676)

2.The Visitation: Questions for Reflection

1. *Through the Eyes of Mary:* It was an act of faith for Mary to pack up and leave to go to Elizabeth without have any ‘proof’ that her elderly cousin was present. It was also an act of charity to endure the danger and difficulty of traveling to care for another. Who is the “Elizabeth” in your life who God wants you to go over and above to serve this Advent season?

2. *In the Heart of Mary:* Try to imagine how Mary felt when her elder cousin called her “the mother of my Lord” and shouted “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” Talk to Mary about how she feels when you honor Christ within her by saying those words to her in the Hail Mary

3. *With the Mind of the Church*: the *Catechism* teaches that Mary is the new “Ark of the Covenant” (CCC 2676). How does this mystery affect your beliefs about Mary and your relationship with her? How does it affect your understanding of who Christ is?

Resources for Further Study

1. Brant Pitre, *Mother of the Messiah* (audio CD)
2. Catholic Answers, *The Essential Catholic Survival Guide* (Book)
3. Edward Sri, *The New Rosary in Scripture* (Book)
4. John Paul II, *On the Most Holy Rosary* (www.vatican.va)
5. *The Scriptural Rosary*

3. The Nativity in Bethlehem

The Nativity

In those days a decree went out from *Caesar Augustus* that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.* And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for *to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of goodwill!”*

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been

told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. *But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.* And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:1-20)

Caesar Augustus: Worshiped as a “Divine” Emperor and “Savior”

The Priene Inscription: “Since the Providence which has ordered all things is deeply interested in our life has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit mankind, sending him as *a savior* (Greek *soter*), both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, *Caesar*, by his appearance, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since *the birthday of the god Augustus* was the beginning for the world of the *good news* that came by reason of him” (trans. in *Hellenistic Commentary on the New Testament* 1995, 169)

Pope Benedict XVI: Jesus vs. Caesar

[T]he link between Jesus and Augustus goes deeper. Augustus did not want merely to be a ruler like any other, such as had existed before him and would come after him. The inscription at Priene, from the year 9 B.C., helps us to understand how he wanted to be seen and understood... This title (“savior”), which literature ascribed to Zeus, is reserved in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to God alone. (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 3.60)

The Anointing of King David at Bethlehem

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to *Jesse the Bethlehemite*, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons...” Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to *Bethlehem*... And he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed (Hebrew *mashiah*; Greek *christos*) is before him.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” ... And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here.” And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.” *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.* (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

Bethlehem and the Coming of the Messiah

But you, O *Bethlehem Ephrathah*, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, *from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel*, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

The “Gloria” and the Mystery of Christmas

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.*

We praise you,
We bless you,
We adore you,
We glorify you,
We give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son...

Pope Benedict: the Mystery of the Manger and the Swaddling Clothes

Mary wrapped the child in swaddling cloths. Without yielding to sentimentality, we may imagine with what great love Mary approached her hour and prepared for the birth of her child. Iconographic tradition has theologically interpreted the manger and the swaddling cloths in terms of the theology of the Fathers. The child stiffly wrapped in bandages is seen as prefiguring the hour of his death: from the outset, he is the sacrificial victim... The manger, then, was seen as a kind of altar.... But now, lying in the manger, is he who called himself the true bread come down from heaven, the true nourishment that we need in order to be fully ourselves. This is the food that gives us true life, eternal life. (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 3.68).

3. The Nativity: Questions for Reflection

1. *Through the Eyes of Mary*: As a Jewish woman, Mary would have known that the Messiah was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. As a human being, she would also have known the difficulties and dangers involved in traveling while pregnant to another city in order to have the child. How would you have responded to the realization that your first child would not be born in the comfort of your home but in a strange place? Has God ever ‘thrown you for a loop’ at a time of crisis like this? Talk to Mary about it...

2. *In the Heart of Mary*: St. Luke tells us that Mary kept the events surrounding Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and "pondered them in her heart." Take some time to meditate on the mystery of Christmas, and ask Mary to help you see the baby Jesus through her eyes and with her heart.

3. *With the Mind of the Church*: Pope Benedict XVI describes the "swaddling clothes" of the infant Jesus as prefiguring his shroud and the "manger" as an "altar" from which we would receive the flesh of the Christ child, the true bread from heaven. How does this imagery affect the way you see the Eucharist? What are you receiving when you say "Amen" in Holy Communion?

Resources for Further Study

1. Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* (Book, CD)
2. Brant Pitre, *A Biblical Explanation of the Mass* (CD, DVD)
3. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Volume 3*. (Book)
4. Brant Pitre, *Why Do I Have to Go to Confession?* (CD)

4. The Magi and Epiphany

The Magi Come to Worship Jesus

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.*" When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, *he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.* They told him, "*In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'*"

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." *When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the*

child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)

The Prophecy of the Scepter and the Star

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: *a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab...* (Numbers 24:15-17)

Jewish Prophecies of the Future King of the World

Give *the king* thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son! ...May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations! ...*May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!* ...May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, *may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!* ...*May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!* Long may he live, *may gold of Sheba be given to him!* ...May men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed! (Psalm 72:1, 5, 8, 10, 15, 17)

Pagan Prophecies of the Future King of the World

There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome—as afterwards appeared from the event—the people of Judaea took to themselves. (Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian* 4.5; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13)

The Church Fathers: The Miraculous Conversion of the Pagan World

Behold how today, yes, in our own times, our eyes see not only Egyptians, but every race of men who used to be idolaters . . . released from the errors of polytheism and the demons, and calling on the God of the prophets! . . . *Yes, in our own time the knowledge of the Omnipotent God shines forth and sets a seal of certainty on the forecasts of the prophets. You see this actually going on, you no longer only expect to hear of it, and if you ask the moment when the change began, for all your inquiry you will receive no other answer but the moment of the appearance of the Savior. . . .* And who would not be struck by the extraordinary change—that men who for ages have paid divine honor to wood and stone and demons, wild beasts that feed on human flesh, poisonous reptiles, animals of every kinds... and the lifeless elements of the universe should after our Savior's coming pray to the Most High God, Creator of Heaven and earth, the actual Lord of the prophets, and the God of Abraham and his forefathers? (Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, 1.6.20–21)

The Catechism on Epiphany

The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise

men (*magi*) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. In the *magi*, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees *the first-fruits of the nations*, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The *magi*'s coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations. *Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning toward the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament.* The Epiphany shows that “the full number of the nations” now takes its “place in the family of the patriarchs,” and acquires *Israelitica dignitas* (are made “worthy of the heritage of Israel”). (CCC 528)

The Gentiles will Come to the New Jerusalem (aka “Daughter of Zion”)

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you... [N]ations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising... And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. *Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms.* Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, *the wealth of the nations shall come to you.* A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. *They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.* (Isaiah 60:3-6)

The Catechism on Mary as the Daughter of Zion

Mary is full of grace because the Lord is with her. The grace with which she is filled is the presence of him who is the source of all grace. “Rejoice ... O Daughter of Jerusalem ... the Lord your God is in your midst.” *Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person...* (CCC 2676)

Conclusion: Mary, Did You Know?

What Did Mary “Ponder” in Her Heart? The Fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures

Venerable Bede: Abiding by the rules of virginal modesty, Mary wished to divulge to no one the secret things which she knew about Christ. She reverently waited for the time and place when he would wish to divulge them. However, though her mouth was silent, in her careful, watchful heart she weighed these secret things. And this is what the Evangelist says, pondering in her heart—indeed, she weighed those acts which she saw in relation to those things which she had read were to be done. Now she saw that she herself, who had arisen from the stock of Jesse, had conceived God's Son of the Holy Spirit. She had read in the prophet, “A shoot will sprout from the root of Jesse... and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him” (Isa 11:1-2). She had read, “And you, Bethlehem Ephratha, are a

little one among the thousands of Judah. Out of your will come forth for me the one who is ruler in Israel, and his coming forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity” (Mic 5:2). She saw that she had given birth in Bethlehem to the Ruler of Israel, who was born eternal from the Father, God before the ages. She saw that she had conceived as a virgin, and given birth to a son, and called his name Jesus. She had read in the prophets, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Immanuel” (Isa 7:14)... She remembered that it had been said to her by the angel, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and so the holy one who will be born from you will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). She had read, “And you, tower of the flock, misty daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former power shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem” (Mic 4:8)... *She then knew that the Lord had come in the flesh*, whose power is one and eternal with the Father, and he would give to his daughter the church the kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem. *Mary was comparing these things which she had read were to occur with those which she recognized as already having occurred.* Nevertheless she did not bring these things forth from her mouth but kept them closed up in her heart. (Venerable Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 1.7)

4. The Epiphany: Questions for Reflection

1. *Through the Eyes of Mary:* As a Jewish woman, Mary would have known about the prophecies that the Gentiles would one day convert to worship the God of Israel. What do you think she thought when she first saw the Magi coming and adoring her child? How did she look at her child after that?

2. *In the Heart of Mary:* As a woman of Scripture, Mary would also have known that the prophets foretold that Gentiles would bring gifts of “gold and frankincense” to the “Daughter of Zion,” and that they would be her “children.” This means that we Gentile Christians are also Mary’s children. Take some time to talk to Jesus your brother about your relationship with Mary your Mother.

3. *With the Mind of the Church:* According to the Catechism, in the Incarnation, the Lord makes “his dwelling” in Mary, who is the “daughter of Zion in person.” Since the

prophets foretold that all the nations would pilgrimage to the Daughter of Zion, the new Jerusalem, how can you do that this Advent season?

Resources for Further Study

1. Edward Sri, *Walking with Mary* (Book)
2. St. Francis De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Book)
3. Brant Pitre, *The Gospel of Matthew* (CD, DVD)
4. Brant Pitre, *The Mass Readings Explained* (<https://store.catholicproductions.com/>)

Reflections on Advent, the Season of Waiting

Elizabeth Pitre

Advent is waiting for Emmanuel, “God with us.” To be “with us” means both in our joy and in our suffering. Several years ago when I was very ill, I made this confession to my husband: “I don’t know who Jesus is anymore.” As I was suffering greatly, he replied, “He is the God who suffers with us.” I didn’t like this answer, so in my contrary way I retorted, “I don’t want him to suffer with me; I want him to rescue me. I want him to be the God who rescues me!” He came back with, “Well, he is both.” It was only then that I began to see. I am like the Jews of ancient days. I was waiting quite impatiently to be delivered from my pain and suffering, but what I didn’t understand was that my true deliverance would come through that suffering.

My favorite mystery of the Rosary is the Transfiguration of Jesus. I am like Peter: “Lord, it is good to be here! Let’s just stay on this mountain forever, beholding your glory!” But what Peter didn’t know was that the deliverance he had prayed for all of his life would include a cross, that God’s plan for deliverance would climax on a different mountain called Calvary, that the Lord would undergo his Passion in order to accomplish his final act of deliverance in his Resurrection. There is no glory without suffering. Peter was disappointed to learn that this glimpse of glory was not the end of the road, that he would have to wait for the ultimate deliverance, and that he had much more to experience and learn through waiting and suffering before getting there.

So why talk about suffering and deliverance? Isn’t that what Lent and Easter are all about? Christmas is just about joy, right? I love all of the high seasons of the Church, but Advent is my favorite. It is my favorite for this reason: Advent shows us how to prepare ourselves and our hearts for all that the Lord has to offer us in our lives whether it is suffering or joy (and for each one of us, it will be a different combination of both). Advent begins the liturgical year in the Church, and it begins our preparation for

receiving our Deliverer first as a newborn baby. The first thing that we are asked to do in our preparation is to wait.

I am like most people: I hate waiting! I am impatient and want problems to be resolved as soon as possible. I am like my children, wanting to skip the work and get to the fun stuff. But for some strange reason, I really love this season of waiting. Being a mother to five children, I have experienced the waiting and anticipation of a new child through pregnancy. We all have periods in our lives where we are waiting for something. Waiting is hard. If it is not already accompanied by suffering, it produces its own kind of suffering. It can even be painful to wait! I was always taught that patience in waiting produces growth in virtue. It is in the waiting that we are given the opportunity to grow in anticipation of the good we are waiting for perhaps in order to appreciate it better.

But there is more to waiting than just the anticipation of for something to happen or for something to be done, because in waiting, there is always hope. Hope for something better, hope for an end to our suffering, hope for deliverance from this human condition we find ourselves in. God uses time to give us the gifts he desires for us, the ultimate one being our eternal salvation and everlasting life with him. Just like the time required for the child to grow in the womb, there is time required for our own “mystical incarnation,” that is, time for Christ to “grow” in us just as he grew in Mary for nine months. That is Advent. We need that time in order to prepare our hearts to receive the joy of Christmas, the lessons of Ordinary Time, the suffering of Lent, the glorious deliverance of Easter, and more lessons of Ordinary Time. Liturgically, we go in circles, right back to Advent. I like to think that Advent brings us “full circle” and reminds us that we are still waiting throughout our whole lives for Christ to come again or to call each of us to himself.

It intrigues me how we are in such a hurry to enter the joy of Christmas without first going through the hopeful waiting of Advent. We skip from giving thanks to putting up the tree, and we hear fun and jolly Christmas music even sooner than that! We don't want to wait! As Catholics we wouldn't dream of skipping Lent with its fasting and sacrifices and go right to Easter. So why are we in such a hurry to get to Christmas without observing the penitential season of Advent? Just as Lent takes us on a journey in the wilderness with Jesus, Advent is our journey with the Israelites in slavery and then wandering in the wilderness, waiting with hope for a deliverer, a messiah, the hope of our salvation.

In our family, we put a big emphasis on waiting and preparation during Advent. We do not put up the tree and Christmas decorations and lights the day after Thanksgiving. Instead, we clean the entire house, closets and all. We de-clutter and put things in order. We begin Advent by making room, clearing out the messes we have been collecting and clearing away the distractions. Exteriorly, we are making room for Christmas decorations and perhaps the new gifts we will be receiving. But it symbolizes what we wish to happen interiorly, to simplify our lives and make room in our hearts to receive Christ. Each time we have had a baby, we clean and de-clutter the house to make room for the baby physically, but we also clear the calendar and forego too much activity

in order to enter a period of rest and peace in anticipation of knowing that we will need more intimate time for the baby.

This is Advent. Making room, preparing ourselves for baby Jesus and then waiting for him to come. This is why I love it. A time of joyful, hopeful anticipation of a new baby to love is one of God's sweetest gifts to the family. In the advent of the Christ Child, this is the gift God gives to the whole world "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior..." who will deliver us from our sins, our sufferings, and our sorrows. And when he finally comes at Christmas, we receive him all the more with joy because we have been preparing and waiting those four long weeks.

Following this page, I am including a snapshot of the traditions we have come to use with our children over the years as our family has grown. We have found that our children love the anticipation of Advent. It is truly the most special time of the year for us as a family. We begin by taking out their "Christmas bears" which they each received for their very first Christmas. Our tradition is that the Christmas bears come down from the attic to help us prepare for Christmas and then they go back up on Epiphany (Jan. 6). This is their FAVORITE thing, having to wait all year long to see their bears again! We are big fans of making our kids wait. Other traditions like the Jesse Tree, advent wreath, singing the O' Antiphons, and celebrating the Feasts within the season are all beautiful ways of helping the family to enter into the Advent Season with joyful anticipation of Christmas.

I hope that this Advent, the Lord Jesus fills your heart with hope as you prepare to receive him at Christmas!

Our Advent Traditions

First Week of Advent:

- Clean and de-clutter the house.
- Take out Christmas bears.
- Set up Advent wreath (1 purple candle).
- Put up Christmas trees; decorate with purple ribbons.
- Set up Jesse Tree and begin nightly scripture reflections.
- Clear mantle, cover with purple cloth.
- Start Christmas countdown calendar.
- Play Advent music.

Second Week of Advent:

- Set up nativity scenes without Baby Jesus.
- Advent wreath (2 purple candles)
- Set up St. Nicholas' spot and children's Christmas books.
- Prepare for St. Nicholas' Feast Day (Dec. 6, children put out shoes for treats.)
- Go to mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8).
- Continue Jesse Tree nightly reflections.

Third Week of Advent “Gaudete Sunday”:

- Put up Christmas lights outside.
- Light the Christmas trees.
- Advent wreath (2 purple, 1 pink candle)
- Continue Jesse Tree nightly reflections.
- Begin O’ Antiphons (Dec. 17)

Fourth Week of Advent:

- Advent wreath (light all candles)
- Continue Jesse Tree nightly reflections
- Continue O’ Antiphons
- Bake cookies.
- Wrap gifts.
- Decorate the tree.

Christmas Eve:

- Hide all of the Baby Jesus figurines.
- Prepare for Mass.
- Take pictures of kids with bears in front of the tree.
- Finish the Jesse Tree and O’ Antiphons at dinner.
- Go to Vigil Mass.
- After mass, get dressed for bed.
- Find all the Baby Jesus figures and put them in the Nativities.
- Eat cookies and hang stockings.