

The Biblical Roots of Advent

The Problem of Advent

1. Most stressful liturgical season of the year
2. Overshadowed by Christmas shopping and holiday activities¹
3. A Penitential Season (Purple), but filled with parties and celebrations
4. Beginning of the Liturgical Year, so it must be important
5. Not clear how we are to celebrate it:

J. Neil Alexander: “Advent presents more problems than any other season in the liturgical year. Not the least of these problems is that of knowing how to observe the season.”

The Double Meaning of Advent

1. Adventus: Latin word meaning “coming”
2. Twofold Meaning:
 - a. Second Advent of Christ as Judge (Gk *parousia*; Matt 24:27; 1 Cor 15:23; 2 Thess 2:8)
 - b. First Advent of Christ in the Incarnation

Advent has a *twofold character*: as a season to prepare for Christmas when *Christ’s first coming* to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation. (*General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*)²

How Can We Enter into the Mystery of Advent?

1. Deepen Our Understanding for the *Scripture Readings* for the Sundays of Advent
2. The Readings for Advent
 1. Old Testament Readings: Prophecies about the Messiah and the messianic age of salvation
 2. Responsorial Psalms: express our desire to see God and be with him forever.
 3. New Testament Readings: exhortations from the letters of the apostles to help us live out the season
 4. Gospel Readings: passages about Jesus’ Second coming at the end of time and his first coming in the Incarnation.

¹ Cited in Normand Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 129.

² Cited in Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*, 129.

1. The Second Advent of Jesus at the End of Time (1st Sunday of Advent)

What Will Happen at the End of Time?

1. Protestant Christians: often very interested in topics like
 - a. Tribulation and the Antichrist
 - b. The so-called “Rapture” (a false doctrine)
2. Catholic Christians: often very vague about what will happen at the end of time
 - a. Jesus will come back and judge the world...maybe?
 - b. Anything else?
3. Season of Advent:
 - a. Begins the Liturgical Year by focusing our minds on *the end of time*
 - b. Begins with prophecies about the Second Coming of Jesus

The Unexpected Coming of the Son of Man (First Sunday, Year A)

[Jesus said to his disciples:] “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming (Greek *parousia*) 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 when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.* Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. *Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.* But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched 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 hour you do not expect.* (Matthew 24:37-44)

Flood, Fire, and Scoffers at the Second Coming of Christ (Second Sunday, Year B)

This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, “*Where is the promise of his coming (Gk *parousia*)?* For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” *They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.* But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.* Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:1-13)

The Need to Watch and Stay Awake (First Sunday, Year B)

Take heed, watch (Greek gregoreo); for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning ---lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch." (Mark 13:33-37)

The Catechism on the Last Judgment

The resurrection of all the dead, "of both the just and the unjust," will precede the Last Judgment. This will be "the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of man's] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Then Christ will come "in his glory, and all the angels with him. . . . Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. . . . And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man's relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life... The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming.

Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the final word on all history. *We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end.* The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death. (CCC 1038-1040)

The Tribulation and the Coming of the Son of Man (First Sunday, Year C)

[Jesus said to his disciples:] "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near..."

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man." (Luke 21:25-28)

The Catechism on the Final Tribulation and the Antichrist

Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh. The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism. The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven.⁵⁸⁰ God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world (CCC 675-677)

What Can We Do to Be Ready? (First Sunday, Year A)

The message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them "the acceptable time, . . . the day of salvation." It inspires a holy fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the "blessed hope" of the Lord's return, when he will come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed." (CCC 1041)

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:11-14)

2. John the Baptist and the Preparation (2nd and 3rd Sundays of Advent)

The 2nd and 3rd Sundays of Advent

1. This is where many get lost (if you weren't lost already)
2. Scripture Readings turn from End of Time to
 - a. Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah
 - b. Life and teaching of John the Baptist
3. For many Catholics, this is unfamiliar territory
 - a. Old Testament prophecies are hard to understand
 - b. John the Baptist is strange, 'fire and brimstone' preacher
4. Why Spend Two Weeks of Advent on these readings?

The *Catechism* on John the Baptist and Advent

The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the "First Covenant". He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.

St. John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. "Prophet of the Most High", John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". Going before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elijah", John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom. (CCC 522-523)

The Coming of John the Baptist (2nd Sunday, Year A)

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Isaiah 40:3). Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sad'ducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. *Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.*" (Matthew 3:1-12; compare Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:1-6)

The Good News of the Coming of God (2nd Sunday, Year B)

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. *A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken...." Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of *good tidings* (Hebrew "good news"); lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, *herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"* Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11)

The Messiah from the Stump of Jesse's Tree (2nd Sunday, Year A)

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. *In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.* (Isaiah 11:1-10)

Who Is John the Baptist? (2nd Sunday, Year B)

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. *He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.* And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, *"I am not the Christ."* And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, *"I am not."* "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, *"No."* They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, *"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."* Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, *"I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."* This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:6-8, 19-29)

Jesus and John the Baptist (3rd Sunday, Year A)

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.*"

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:2-11)

The Signs of the Coming of God (3rd Sunday, Year A)

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy...* And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:1-6, 10)

How is John the Baptist the Greatest of Men? (Cornelius A. Lapse, S.J.)

Christ... here call s John the greatest of all men, for otherwise He would not conclude from thence that he was "more than a prophet," which He nevertheless proceeds to prove. This must be understood of the worthies of the Old Testament, that is to say, of all time prior to Christ. John, therefore, is not here compared with Christ Himself, or the Blessed Virgin, or the Apostles, who followed Christ and who (by reason of their apostolic dignity) were not less than John, but rather indeed greater than he... In other things, John was equal with, yea greater than, Moses and the rest of the prophets.

First, because John was sanctified in his mother's womb and actually prophesied: leaping for joy in the womb, he announced to his mother and the others that Christ was now incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin... We do not read this about any other prophet.

Second, because only John instituted the baptism of repentance and baptized Christ with it.

Third, he was the first to preach the kingdom of heaven, and converted many and brought them into it.

Fourth, he was sent by God to be Christ's precursor and the friend of the Bridegroom, so that he might show Him to the whole world and testify that He is the Messiah and only Son of God; this office and dignity far surpasses all the offices and dignities of the prophets.

Fifth, he is compared to an angel by Malachi and is promised long before his birth, and he was foreshadowed by Elijah and other prophets, for they were types of John.

Sixth... John was, so to speak, a continual miracle, in his conception, in the womb, in his birth, in his angelic life. For by a miracle he was conceived of barren parents; by a miracle he recognized, saluted and adored Christ in the womb; by a miracle he inspired everyone with joy at his birth; by a miracle at his circumcision he restored speech to his mute father; by a miracle the boy went into the desert and lived his whole life there like an angel... And so John has the crowns of virginity, prophecy, and martyrdom, in addition to the crown of a doctor. (Cornelius A Lapide, *The Great Commentary* on Matt 11:11 [4 vols.; trans. Thomas W. Mossman and Michael J. Miller; Fitzwilliam: Loreto, 2008])

What Should We Do to Prepare for His Coming? (3rd Sunday, Year C)

And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" And [John the Baptist] answered them, "*He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.*" Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."...So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. (Luke 3:10-14, 18)

***Gaudete* Sunday (Latin, "Rejoice!"; 2nd Reading, Year C and Entrance Antiphon)**

Rejoice in the Lord always (Latin *Gaudete in Domino semper*); again I will say, Rejoice (*gaudete*). Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. *And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:4-6)

The Catechism on John the Baptist and Advent

John was "filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" by Christ himself, whom the Virgin Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary's visitation to Elizabeth thus became a visit from God to his people. John is "Elijah [who] must come." The fire of the Spirit dwells in him and makes him the forerunner of the coming Lord. In John, the precursor, the Holy Spirit completes the work of "[making] ready a people prepared for the Lord." John the Baptist is "more than a prophet." *In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets.* John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah... As the Spirit of truth will also do, John "came to bear witness to the light." *In John's sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfills the longing of the angels...* Finally, with John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of "the divine likeness," prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ. John's baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth. (CCC 718-720)

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 birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to [John the Baptist's] desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). (CCC 524)

3. The First Coming of the Messiah (4th Sunday in Advent)

Jesus Christ: “The Only Person Ever Pre-Announced”

History is full of men who have claimed that they came from God, or that they were gods, or that they bore messages from God—Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Christ, Lao-tze, and thousands of others, right down to the person who founded a new religion this very day. Each of them has a right to be heard and considered. But as a yardstick external to and outside of whatever is to be measured is needed, so there must be some permanent tests available to all men, all civilizations, and all ages, by which they can decide whether any of these claimants, or all of them, are justified in their claims... Reason dictates that if any one of these men actually came from God, the least thing God could do to support His claim would be to pre-announce his coming. Automobile manufacturers tell their customers when to expect a new model. If God sent anyone from Himself, or if He came Himself with a vitally important message for all men, it would seem reasonable that He would first let men know when His messenger was coming, where He would be born, where He would live, the doctrine He would teach, the enemies he would make, the program He would adopt for the future, and the manner of his death. By the extent to which the messenger conformed with these announcements, one could judge the validity of his claims. Reason further assures us that if God did not do this, then there would be nothing to prevent any impostor from appearing in history and saying, “I come from God,” or “An angel appeared to me in the desert and gave me this message.” In such cases, there would be no objective historical way of testing the messenger. We would only have his word for it, and of course, he could be wrong... Socrates had no one to foretell his birth. Buddha had no one to pre-announce him and his message or tell the day when he would sit under the tree. Confucius did not have the name of his mother and his birthplace recorded, nor were they given to men centuries before he arrived so that when he did come, men would know he was a messenger from God. But, with Christ it was different. Because of the Old Testament prophecies, His coming was not unexpected. There were no predictions about Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tze, Mohammed, or anyone else; but there were predictions about Christ. Others just came and said, “Here I am, believe me.” Christ alone stepped out of that line saying, “Search the writings of the Jewish people...” (Fulton Sheen, *The Life of Christ*, p. 1-2)

Timeline of Biblical Prophecy

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| 1800 B.C. | Abraham promised that all nations would be blessed through him |
| 1450 B.C. | Moses and 12 Tribes are Set free from Egypt in the Exodus |
| 1000 B.C. | David Rules over Kingdom of Israel—all 12 Tribes |
| 922 B.C. | Kingdom of David Splits in Two Northern Kingdom—10 Tribes of Israel Southern Kingdom—2 Tribes of Judah |
| 722 B.C. | 10 Northern Tribes scattered in Assyrian Exile |
| 587 B.C. | 2 Southern Tribes scattered in Babylonian Exile Jerusalem and the Temple Destroyed |
| 539 B.C. | 2 Southern Tribes return from Babylon to begin rebuilding the Temple |
| 1 B.C. | 10 Tribes Remain Lost among Gentile nations Jewish People waiting for Coming of Messiah and restoration of Kingdom |

The Annunciation to Mary (4th Sunday, Year B)

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. 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 for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Greek, *andra ou ginosko* "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 Everlasting Kingdom of David (4th Sunday, Year B)

Now when the king [David] dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies round about, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, `Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? ...` Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. *Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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 for ever. 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 7:1-5, 8-14a, 16)

The Coming of the Messiah from Bethlehem

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.* Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. (Micah 4:1-4)

The Birth of Emmanuel (4th Sunday, Year A)

Now the birth of *Jesus Christ* took place in this way. *When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit*, and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*" All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel*" (which means, God with us) (Isaiah 7:14). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. (Matthew 1:18-24).

The Catechism on Meaning of Jesus' Name

Jesus means in Hebrew: "God saves." *At the annunciation, the angel Gabriel gave him the name Jesus as his proper name, which expresses both his identity and his mission.* Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man, "will save his people from their sins". In Jesus, God recapitulates all of his history of salvation on behalf of men. (CCC 430)

Isaiah's Prophecy of the Virgin Birth (4th Sunday, Year A)

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 virgin* (Hebrew, 'almah; Greek parthenos) *shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" (Isaiah 7:10-14)

The Catechism on the Virgin Birth of Jesus

From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed". The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that *it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own...* The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as *a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility*: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit", said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée. *The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."* (CCC 496-497)

The Catechism on Whether the Virgin Birth is Just a "Legend"

Some might wonder if we were merely dealing with legends or theological constructs not claiming to be history. To this we must respond: *Faith in the virginal conception of Jesus met with the lively opposition, mockery or incomprehension of non-believers, Jews and pagans alike; so it could hardly have been motivated by pagan mythology or by some adaptation to the ideas of the age.* The meaning of this event is accessible only to faith, which understands in it the "connection of these mysteries with one another" in the totality of Christ's mysteries, from his Incarnation to his Passover. (CCC 498)

1. Jesus is the Divine Son of God

The eyes of faith can discover in the context of the whole of Revelation the mysterious reasons why God in his saving plan wanted his Son to be born of a virgin. Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. *Jesus has only God as Father*. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures." (CCC 502-503)

2. Jesus is the Beginning of a New Creation

Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because *he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation*: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven." From his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God "gives him the Spirit without measure." From "his fullness" as the head of redeemed humanity "we have all received, grace upon grace." (CCC 504)

3. The New Creation is the Work of the Holy Spirit

By his virginal conception, *Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith*. "How can this be?" Participation in the divine life arises "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God". *The acceptance of this life is virginal because it is entirely the Spirit's gift to man*. The spousal character of the human vocation in relation to God is fulfilled perfectly in Mary's virginal motherhood. (CCC 505)

The Beauty of the Incarnation

When Christ was born... there had been a false note of moral discord introduced by the first man which infected all humanity. What He did, therefore, was to ask a woman, representing humanity, freely to give him a human nature with which he could start a new humanity. As there was an old humanity in Adam, so there would be a new humanity in Christ, who was God made man through the free agency of a human mother. When the angel appeared to Mary, God was announcing this love for the new humanity. It was the beginning of a new earth, and Mary became "a flesh-girt Paradise to be gardened by the Adam new." As in the first garden Eve brought destruction, so in the garden of her womb, Mary would now bring Redemption. For the nine months that He was cloistered within her, all the food, the wheat, the grapes she consumed served as a kind of natural Eucharist, passing into Him Who later on was to declare that He was the Bread and Wine of Life. After her nine months were over, the fitting place for Him to be born was Bethlehem, which meant "House of Bread." Later on He would say: "God's gift of bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the whole world" (John 6:33). "I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to me will never be hungry" (John 6:35). When the Divine Child was conceived, Mary's humanity gave Him hands and feet, eyes and ears, and a body with which to suffer. Just as the petals of a rose after a dew close on the dew as if to absorb its energies, so too, Mary, as the Mystical Rose closed upon Him Whom the Old Testament had described as a dew descending upon the earth. When she finally did give Him birth, it was as if a great ciborium had opened, and she was holding in her fingers the Guest Who was also the Host of the world, as if to say, "Look, this is the Lamb of God; this is He Who Takes away the sins of the world." (Fulton Sheen, *The Life of Christ*, pp. 8-9)