

The Way of Hope



Stations of Advent
"The Journey to Bethlehem"



OH THAT YOU WOULD TEAR THE
HEAVENS OPEN AND COME DOWN

INTRODUCTION

*“Go up on a high mountain,
joyful messenger to Zion.
Shout with a loud voice,
joyful messenger to Jerusalem.
Shout without fear,
say to the towns of Judah,
‘Here is your God.’*

*Here is the Lord coming with power,
his arm subduing all things to him.
The prize of his victory is with him,
his trophies all go before him.
He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms,
holding them against his breast
and leading to their rest the mother ewes.” Isaiah 40:8-11*

O God,
who have shown forth your salvation
to all the ends of the earth,
grant, we pray,
that we may look forward in joy
to the glorious Nativity of Christ.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.



1 The Sin of Eve

L: The Dawn from on high will visit us:
All: **Guiding our feet in the way of peace!**

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live.” (Genesis 3:6-7.20)

Consider how the journey to Bethlehem begins in the Garden of Eden, when God’s perfect Creation is spoiled by the pride and selfishness of humanity, signified by the disobedience of Eve and Adam. Yet even then God, in perfect love, establishes the divine plan, whereby a new Eve, Mary, will say “Yes” to God in perfect obedience, to become the mother of our salvation.

We pray for ourselves, our families and friends in this Advent Season, that we may be kept free from pride and selfishness; may the grace of Baptism, which washed away the stains of original sin, be strengthened in us as we patiently await the coming feast.

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence.

All: **Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.**



2 The Vision of Isaiah

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“Then Isaiah said: ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.’” (Isaiah 7:13-14)

Consider how God, never abandoning the chosen people, even though they turned away again and again, sent prophets to fill the people with hope. Isaiah received a vision, which he was to share with the rebellious king Ahaz, that a virgin would bring a child into the world, who would be “God-with-us”—Emmanuel.

We live in a world where it is easy to be cynical about Divine Providence, where we rely solely on our own efforts and, like King Ahaz, reject the promise of God’s love. We pray for rulers and leaders of our world, that they may not simply rely on their own strength, but allow God’s Spirit to guide them.

O God, who have shown forth your salvation to all the ends of the earth, grant, we pray, that we may look forward in joy to the glorious Nativity of Christ.

All: **Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.**



3 The Promise of Jeremiah

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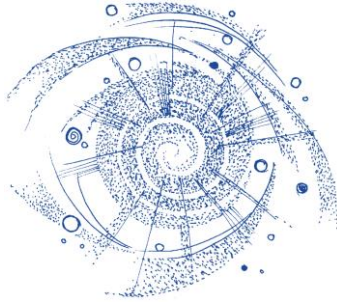
“They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.” (Jeremiah 31:12-13)

Consider how, even in the turmoil of war and exile, God’s plan unfolded, and the prophets continued to invite the chosen people to look forward with hope to a day of salvation, when joy and merriment would be born again for all God’s children. Jeremiah prophesies the return to the lost paradise of Eden, when the sorrows of human life will be transformed into gladness.

Our world still sees conflict, wars, exiles and refugees: the victims of these tragedies are never forgotten by God, who constantly prompts men and women of good will to be prophets of joy and hope to all who suffer. We pray for all exiles and refugees, and for all who know mourning and sorrow.

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.

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4 The Fullness of Time

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“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Consider the patience of our God, who allowed centuries to pass, constantly calling the chosen people back, sending prophets and speaking the Word of Hope to them all. Finally, the time had come, when God would send, not a prophet speaking God’s Word, but the very Word of God, taking our very flesh, to unite us to God in a New and Eternal Covenant.

We live in an impatient world: our technological age has brought an expectation that things happen now – waiting is old-fashioned. And yet there are many things which cannot be rushed, that we cannot control. We pray for the gift of patience and trust in the timeless plan of our loving God.

May the splendour of your glory dawn in our hearts, we pray, almighty God, that all shadows of the night may be scattered and we may be shown to be children of light by the advent of your Only Begotten Son.

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5 The “Ave” of Gabriel

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“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’” (Luke 1:26-28)

Consider how the name of the first woman, “Eva”, is reversed in the greeting of the angel - “Ave” - as the New Eve, Mary, is invited to participate in God’s timeless plan of salvation. Though afraid, Mary says “yes” to God: “I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me as you have said.”

This journey of hope is one of humility: God’s creation was marred by human pride, but human humility, in the persons of Mary and Joseph, will allow God’s new creation to be born. Our world today is still marred by pride, as human greed and selfishness spoil the environment and harm the vulnerable. We pray for the gift of humility in our world.

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.

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6 The Dream of Joseph

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“Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1:19-21)

Consider how Saint Joseph, the just and kind man, though saddened and disappointed that his hopes of a perfect life with Mary, his betrothed, have been shattered by the news of her pregnancy, still has faith and trust in God. He accepts the angel’s message, sacrifices his own ambitions and desires, and humbly agrees to play his part in God’s plan of salvation.

How we love to make our plans and be in control of our own destiny! And yet how fragile is such a conceit! So often our plans can be shattered – by strikes or lockdowns, by the needs of family or friends, by ill-health or even death. We pray that Saint Joseph, who weathered such changing circumstance with faith and goodness, will help us to be more trusting in Divine goodness.

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by Saint Joseph’s intercession your Church may constantly watch over the unfolding of the mysteries of human salvation, whose beginnings you entrusted to his faithful care.

All: **Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.**



7 The Marriage of Mary and Joseph

L: The Dawn from on high will visit us:
All: **Guiding our feet in the way of peace!**

“When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.” (Matthew 1:24)

Consider how Joseph and Mary, though frightened and disturbed by all that had happened, gave themselves wholeheartedly to God’s plan, and in doing so, gave themselves in a new and deeper love to each other. They embrace and marry in perfect selflessness, trusting utterly in God love and care.

The relationship of Mary and Joseph is full of love and trust, but not as in some idealistic, romantic novel! It is rooted in the hardships of the choices they had to face, the struggles they had to overcome, the pride and suspicion they avoided at every turn. We pray for families, and especially married couples, that they may embrace with love and trust each day, not in spite of but because of the difficulties they experience together.

We pray, O Lord, that, just as Saint Joseph served with loving care your Only Begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, so we may be worthy to minister to you with a pure heart.

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8 The Visitation to Elizabeth

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“In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.’” (Luke 1:39-42)

Consider how Mary, despite having received her own momentous news of the child that she was to bear, hastened to her kinswomen Elizabeth, to offer her love and assistance in her pregnancy. Elizabeth greeted Mary with joy, as did the child John the Baptist in her womb, leaping with joy at the closeness of the promised Saviour!

Our society constantly runs the risk of descending into selfishness. We must make special efforts to give of ourselves to others – in particular our own family members when they are in need, We pray particularly for the elderly, for our grandparents and all our elders, that like Mary, we may hasten to help them in times of need.

Almighty ever-living God, who, while the Blessed Virgin Mary was carrying your Son in her womb, inspired her to visit Elizabeth, grant us, we pray, that, faithful to the promptings of the Spirit, we may magnify your greatness with the Virgin Mary at all times.

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9 The Birth of John the Baptist

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“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’” (Luke 1:57-60)

Consider how God’s plan unfolds: the one who will announce the coming of Salvation is born some six months before the birth of Jesus, and already a new hope is celebrated by the family and friends of Elizabeth and Zechariah. The Baptist’s birth is accompanied by strange signs and happenings, not least the name he is given – John – which means “God is gracious and merciful.”

The journey to Bethlehem is marked by so many examples of humility: the humility of Mary, of Joseph, and here of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who abandon family traditions to give their child a new name. The child will be humble too – John will grow up willing only that Jesus may increase, and he may decrease. Let us pray for humility in all members of the Church, especially our leaders.

O God, who raised up Saint John the Baptist to make ready a nation fit for Christ the Lord, give your people, we pray, the grace of spiritual joys and direct the hearts of all the faithful into the way of salvation and peace.

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10 The Census of Augustus

L: The Dawn from on high will visit us:
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*“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.”
(Luke 2:1-4)*

Consider how the plans of Mary and Joseph were once more disrupted, this time by a decree from far away Rome. The emperor Augustus, desiring to count and tax all the subjects of the Roman Empire, issues a decree that has a profound impact on their lives, forcing them to abandon plans for a comfortable birth at home and set out on a challenging journey to Joseph’s hometown, Bethlehem.

It is not just in our days that the decisions of politicians and leaders have a profound impact on the lives of ordinary folk – this is exactly what happened to Mary and Joseph! Let us pray once more for our politicians and world leaders, that in making their decisions and policies they may always remember ordinary people and the Common Good of all.

Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God, as we await the advent of Christ your Son, so that, when he comes and knocks, he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.

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11 The Journey to Bethlehem

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“Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.” (Luke 2:4-5)

Consider how patiently the pregnant Mary and long-suffering Joseph set out, trusting in the protection and goodness of God, for the long journey to Bethlehem, not knowing what awaits them – where they will stay, how Mary will have her baby, what will happen. Yet they are guided always by hope and trust, putting their own plans and desires to one side to fulfil God’s unfolding plan of salvation.

Faith is not about certainty, but about risk – putting one foot in front of the other when we cannot see the way, but when we are guided by One who can. Let us pray for an increase in faith, especially in our young people, that we may all entrust our journey of life more fully to the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit.

Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.

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12 The Kindness of the Innkeeper

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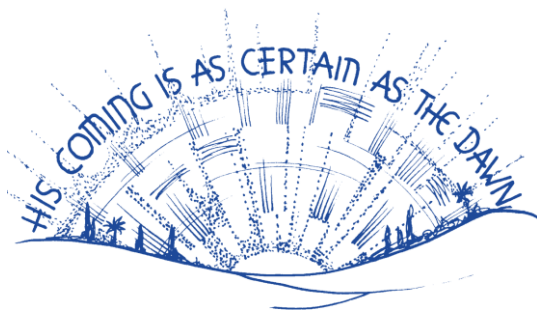
“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

Consider how, arriving at Bethlehem, no place can be found for Mary and Joseph to stay. What panic, what fear must have filled their hearts! And yet the kindness of an innkeeper grants them a stable – a humble place, not a palace or grand mansion – in which the Son of God Almighty might be born for the sake of rich and poor alike.

Charity, as Pope Francis has reminded us, should always hurt a little: especially when we are facing financial difficulties, or a season like this which makes demands on our spending, it is easy to forget the poor. As we remember the kindness of the innkeeper of Bethlehem, let us pledge anew to make this season – and every season – a time of great charity. We pray for those who have nothing, that we may share what we can.

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.

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13 The Labour of Mary

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“Before she was in labour she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labour she delivered her children. “Shall I open the womb and not deliver?” says the Lord; “shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb?” says your God.” (Isaiah 66:7-9)

Consider how, in the dark of midnight, Mary’s labours begin, and how, assisted only by her loving husband: tradition teaches that she did not know pain in her labour, since pain was the result of original sin, from which Mary was preserved at her conception. How fitting that the birth of joy and hope should be free from pain! How great a sign of the new creation, of Paradise restored in Jesus, coming to birth!

In our day pregnancy and child-birth are much safer than in the past, though still times of anxiety and pain. Let us pray for all expectant mothers, that they and their unborn children may be kept safe, and that all mothers and fathers throughout our world may rejoice in the safe delivery of their children.

May the humanity of your Only Begotten Son come, O Lord, to our aid, and may he, who at his birth from the Blessed Virgin did not diminish but consecrated her integrity, by taking from us now our wicked deeds, make us acceptable to you.

All: **Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.**



14 The Birth of Jesus

L: The Dawn from on high will visit us:

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“The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light. For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace. Wide is his dominion in a peace that has no end.” (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Consider how the darkness of the stable in Bethlehem is illumined by the birth of Jesus, a light of hope for all God’s people, reflected in the loving eyes of Mary and Joseph, lauded by angels and marvelled by shepherds!

The mystery of the birth of Christ still has the power to break through the cynicism of our age: the fact that God came, not in power and glory, but humbly, as a vulnerable baby in a poor stable, cuts through to the hearts of all – the proud and the meek, the rich and the poor. We pray that the power of this holy birth may ever be felt throughout our world, so that the fulfilment of God’s promise may be experienced by all.

While all the world, Lord God, lay wrapped in deepest silence, and night had reached its midpoint, your all-powerful Word came down. As year by year the beauty of this night returns, growing old with the aged and renewed in the wonder of children, so may we, grown old in sin but reborn to grace, proclaim with our lives what we chant with our lips: “Glory to you, God, in the highest heaven, peace on earth and in the depths of every heart!”

All: **Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.**

MARIAN ANTHEM

5.



A Lma * Redemptó-ris Máter, quae pérvia caéli-
pórta mánes, Et stélla má-ris, succúrre cadénti súrge-
re qui cúrat pópu-lo : Tu quae genu-ísti, natúra mi-rán-
te, tú-um sánctum Geni-tó-rem : Vírgo pri-us ac posté-
ri-us, Gabri-élis ab óre súmens íllud Ave, peccató-
rum mi-se-ré-re.

Loving mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen
yet strive to rise again.

To the wonderment of nature
you bore your Creator,
yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,
have pity on us poor sinners.



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