

# Advent Reflection

## Week Three: A Reflection from Fr Simon Stamp

**Today we light the third candle on our Advent Wreath**, and we notice it is lighter in colour than the violet candles because it represents joy. We light a rose candle, and the Priest wears rose vestments, because today we celebrate 'Gaudete Sunday', a word which literally means 'Rejoice!' The name of this third Sunday is taken from the Entrance Antiphon at Mass which uses the words of St Paul, 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.' In these beautiful words, St Paul teaches us where our true and lasting joy is to be found – in the nearness of Our Lord to us.

In the coming week, the Church turns our focus from awaiting the Second Coming of Our Lord to preparing for the celebration of Christmas: Our Lord's First Coming in time and history as the Baby of Bethlehem. If there is one word which should sum up our preparation for, and celebration of, Christmas, that word is joy. This was certainly true for those who first prepared for and celebrated this Feast, the angels and the shepherds. The angel of the Lord called the shepherds to the manger at Bethlehem with these words from St Luke's Gospel, 'Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy...'

Often, we find that our joy is taken from us, perhaps by difficulties and setbacks, or world events which seem to get on top of us, or even just by our own lukewarmness. So, on this 'Gaudete Sunday' I want to suggest two practical ways we can keep that spirit of joy as we prepare to celebrate Christmas so that when the day of the Feast arrives, we can truly rejoice in the nearness of Our

Lord. The first is this – in this second half of Advent we must remain very close to Our Lady. In the Litany of Loreto, we call on Our Blessed Lady using the title 'Cause of our joy'. She is the cause of our joy because it is through her that Our Lord comes so near to us in the Incarnation. Imagine how many setbacks and difficulties Our Lady and St Joseph faced on the journey to Bethlehem, and then having to bring Jesus into the world in the cold of a cave, and yet nothing could take their joy away at the Birth of the Saviour, at His nearness.

The second is this – during this second half of Advent, we need to renew what Pope St John Paul II calls our 'Eucharistic amazement'. As we prepare for Christmas, we are in awe that, out of love for us, the Word of God, God the Son, should take on the frailty of our human nature and become man. That Word through Whom all was created, dwelling in silence and littleness and fragility, firstly in Our Lady's Immaculate womb and then able only to make the small sounds and movements of a baby in the manger at Bethlehem. How much more amazed and full of joy must we be when we consider that it was not enough for Our Lord to dwell in poverty, littleness and fragility in the manger of Bethlehem (a place name which means 'House of Bread') but that He chooses to dwell now in the tabernacles of our churches and on our altars in the silence, fragility and littleness of the Holy Eucharist. How could God be any nearer to us than He was as the Baby of Bethlehem? Only He could find a way, by coming to us each and every day until the end of time in the Blessed Sacrament.



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