NOVEMBER 28, 2021

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FIRST Sunday OF Advent

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars.
... When these signs begin to happen,
stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.

Luke 21:25, 28

Watchful Confidence

We the Church enter into Advent and the new liturgical year with a call for a watchful confidence. Our readings were originally addressed to communities undergoing great loss and confusion. Jeremiah speaks confidently of God fulfilling the ancient promises to Israel, even during a time of foreign invasion. Paul speaks of God leading the Church into holiness, while the community longs for the coming of Jesus. In the Gospel passage from Luke, Jesus speaks of powerful signs and of great confusion to come, but emphasizes that we may look forward knowing that God brings not cause for despair, but hope. We celebrate Advent to remind each other of God's faithfulness. We are to be watchful, to see how God is stirring up our world. God disturbs both our pride and our complacency, and brings us healing and justice. We prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus, confident that God indeed fulfills all these divine promises.

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Saints and Special Observances

Sunday: First Sunday of Advent; Hanukkah begins
Tuesday: St. Andrew, Apostle
Wednesday: World AIDS Awareness Day
Friday: St. Francis Xavier
Friday: St. John Damascene; First Friday
Saturday: First Saturday

Readings for the Week

Monday: Is 2:1-5; Ps 122:1-9; Mt 8:5-11

Tuesday: Rom 10:9-18; Ps 19:8-11; Mt 4:18-22

Wednesday: Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23:1-6; Mt 15:29-37

Thursday: Is 26:1-6; Ps 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a; Mt 7:21, 24-27

Friday: Is 29:17-24; Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14; Mt 9:27-31

Saturday: Is 30:19-21, 23-26; Ps 147:1-6; Mt 9:35 — 10:1, 5a, 6-8

Sunday: Bar 5:1-9; Ps 126:1-6; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11; Lk 3:1-6

The Three Comings Of Advent

There are three distinct comings of the Lord of which I know, His coming to humankind, His coming into humankind, and His coming against humankind.

—St. Bernard: Third Sermon for Advent

Today's Readings

First Reading — The days are coming when the LORD will fulfill the promise made to Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 33:14-16).
Psalm — To you, O Lord, I lift my soul (Psalm 25).
Second Reading — May the Lord make you increase and abound in love that you may be blameless in holiness; conduct yourselves so as to please God (1 Thessalonians 3:12 — 4:2).
Gospel — There will be signs and you will see the Son of Man coming with power and great glory. Be vigilant (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36).

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Prayer Of The Week

First Sunday of Advent
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. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Reflection question:

What righteous deeds would I be able to bring with me if Christ returned this week?

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Treasures From Our Tradition

Occasionally, someone raises a surprised complaint that while Christmas arrives on Santa's sleigh at the Macy's parade on Thanksgiving Day, the Church doesn't catch on too fast. They may even say that Advent is a new-fangled idea. Not so. To trace its beginnings, we have to go back to the fourth or fifth century in France (then Gaul), when Epiphany was the favored day, next to Easter, for baptism. The old pagan structures of Rome were collapsing then, and many people sought to be baptized. Since adults always prepared for baptism by fasting, folks counted back a few weeks for a kind of retreat. Before too long, bishops were advising everyone to attend church frequently beginning on December 17. Soon, artists were imagining ways of expressing the Advent mystery, and in Italy this gave rise to beautiful mosaics of empty thrones awaiting the arrival of the Lord of all creation.

Advent as we know it develops on two separate tracks: the first having to do with our spiritual preparation for celebrating the Christmas feast, and the second having to do with the way this is organized and expressed in the liturgical readings and prayers every day of the season.

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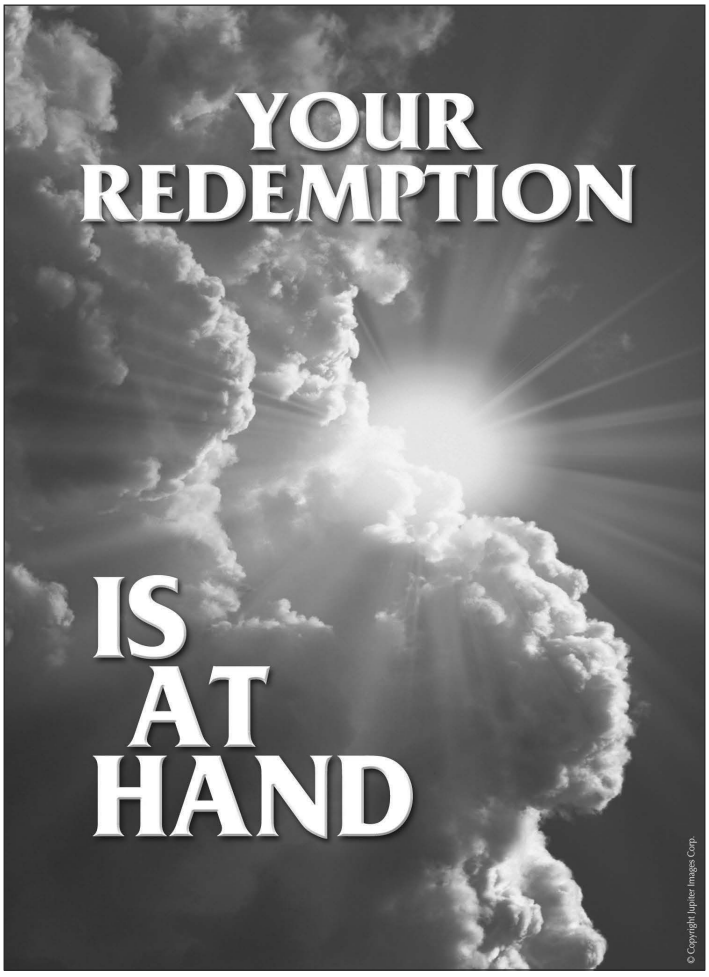

Strengthen Your Hearts

How good is good enough? Do you have to be perfect to get to heaven? In the second reading this Sunday, Paul seems to think so when he tells us to be "blameless in holiness" (1 Thess 3:13.) In fact, he tells the Thessalonians who are pleasing God, to do even more. (4:1) Now Paul never considered himself as perfect: "I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me." (2 Cor 12:7-9) But even with his weakness, Paul always did the best he could. So what should we strive for? Maybe we can take a hint from his phrase "strengthen your hearts."

Think of athletes who try to do their best. A great ball player takes batting practice every day to improve his average. A tennis player will practice her serve to get more aces. A hockey player will keep skating during the summer to get faster. Good athletes are always looking for ways to improve themselves. The keep in shape so they can be stronger, faster, smarter. So what about good Christians? That same attitude is what Paul means by "strengthen your hearts." And Advent is a good time to start.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord, we can get ourselves in spiritual shape. Spiritual reading can give us a stronger prayer life. But like the athlete who can read about the rules or strategies of the sport, we get a stronger prayer life by actually praying. If our spiritual reading just makes us feel good, we may be wasting our time. Hopefully, it will lead us to try praying more often and more seriously. Likewise, we can read about volunteering to feed the poor, but making the commitment and doing it is what strengthens the heart. And how can we be "blameless in holiness. . . at the coming of Our Lord?" Not by bragging about our goodness, but confessing what we have done wrong. Only God's forgiveness can make us blameless. Then as the Gospel says, we may have "the strength. . .to stand before the Son of Man." (Lk 21:36)

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Greatness

The measure of greatness is not the number of servants you have, but the number of people you serve.

—Anonymous

JOHN AND JESUS

Each year the Church opens a different Gospel book and begins to read its stories. Today, the first day of the Church's new liturgical year, we open the Gospel according to Luke. We will read many of its stories until next Advent, when we will begin another liturgical year and read another Gospel.

Luke is a great storyteller, using his words to paint beautiful pictures. He tells us the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus, and he is the only evangelist (Gospel writer) who tells us the story of the birth of John the Baptist. You can find these birth stories in Chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel. The two accounts include some parts that are the same and some that are different.

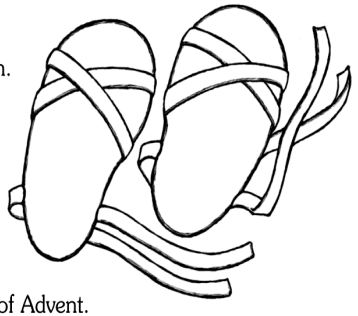
Read these Gospel passages and talk with someone in your family
about what things are the same and what things are different in the two stories.

The angel Gabriel came to Zechariah to tell him about John's birth (Luke 1:19–20).
The angel Gabriel came to Mary to tell her about Jesus' birth (Luke 1:26–27).
What is the same? What is different?

The angel told Zechariah to name his son John (Luke 1:13).
The angel told Mary to name her son Jesus (Luke 1:31).
What is the same? What is different?

Zechariah prayed a hymn of praise called a canticle (Luke 1:68–79).
Mary prayed a hymn of praise called a canticle (Luke 1:46–55).
What is the same? What is different?

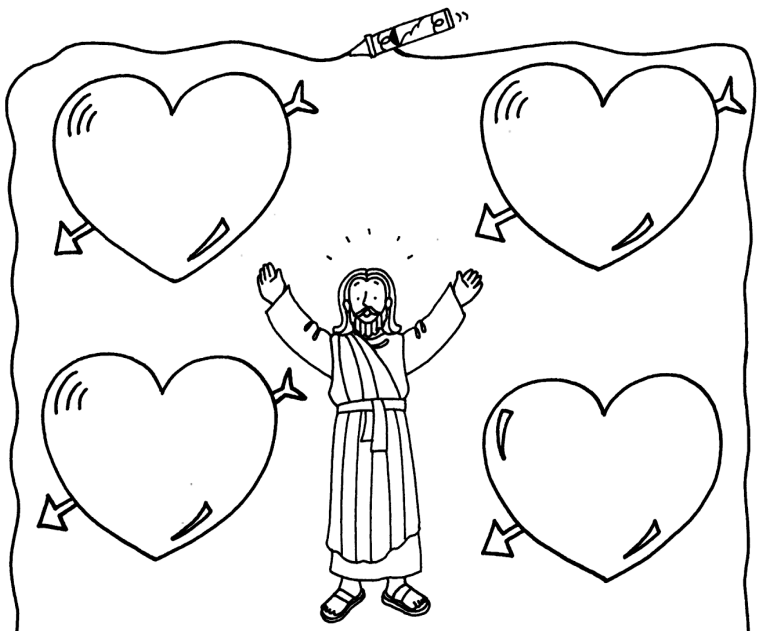
John's parents were Elizabeth and Zechariah.
Jesus' parents were Mary and her husband, Joseph.
What is the same? What is different?



Elizabeth and Mary were cousins.
John the Baptist was part of Jesus' family.
What is the same? What is different?

We will learn more about John in the coming Sundays of Advent.
He is an important person who helped prepare the way for Jesus.

God can fill our hearts with love for one another!
Find and circle the one heart that is
different from the others.
Then write a friend's name inside each heart.
Pray that God will help you to love each one as you should!



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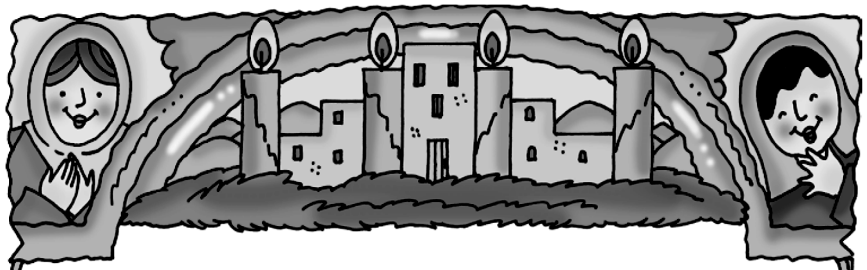
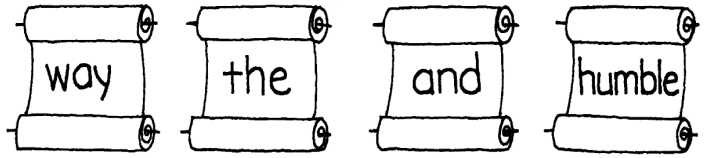
God's Word for Children



First Sunday of Advent

The passage below is from Psalm 25:8-9.
Fill in the blanks by using
each of the words on the scrolls twice.



Good _____ upright is the Lord;
who shows sinners _____ _____.
guides _____ _____ rightly,
_____ teaches the _____ the _____.

FIRST Sunday OF Advent

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars.
When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.
Luke 21:25, 28

A NEW BEGINNING

Today, whether at evening, morning, or midday, in many communities of different churches around the world, the first candle lighted in each Advent wreath silently but beautifully announces the beginning of a new liturgical year. This new beginning presents a grace-filled opportunity for us to resolve to live not simply according to the secular calendar of our commercialized society, but according to the spirit of the liturgy. There's nothing wrong—indeed there can be something quite holy—about planning to celebrate God's surprising gift of the Son by surprising our loved ones with thoughtful gifts at Christmas. But how important, amid the rush of holiday preparations, to take the time and to make the effort to appreciate Advent's early twilights and later sunrises, awash in the purples, deep blues, and even the dusky rose colors we associate with Advent. Thus we let nature's own "Advent" prompt reflections on the "Advent" that Jeremiah saw coming.

IMAGES OF THE END-TIMES

How forcefully today's scriptures challenge us to attend to the ominous nature of the Kingdom's definitive in-breaking! The call echoes through Jeremiah's prophecy: "In those days, in that time" and in Paul's letter: "at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen." The theme intensifies toward a crescendo in Luke: "there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth . . . dismay and perplexity." People will be scared to death—literally—"in anticipation of what is coming upon the world," as "seas and waves roar" and "the powers of heaven will be shaken." And all of this will be just a prelude to "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." In the face of this "awful" (that is, filled-with-awe) ending, Jesus warns his disciples to guard against two equally debilitating extremes, both of which seem to be trademarks of our contemporary culture: deadening diversion on one hand, and frantic anxiety on the other.

PREPARATION FOR THE END-TIMES

In light of these predictions of frightening end-times, Jesus advises us to embrace his three-fold "Preparation for the End Program": (1) "Beware!" that is, be aware of what really matters, life's true priorities. (2) "Be vigilant at all times," that is, watchful for Christ's coming not only at the end but in the meantime, in family and neighbor, friend and stranger. (3) Above all, "pray." Prayer, communion with God, will help us to remember that for faithful disciples, The End of this world—or our own lives, whichever comes first—will be The Beginning of a joy no one can take from us, fullness of life that will never end. How lovely if this Advent's renewal prepared us to look forward to the moment of Jesus' coming—in his glory or our death—not as a cataclysmic disaster, but as a reason for which to "stand erect and raise (our) heads (in joyful expectation) because (our) redemption is at hand."

TODAY'S READINGS

Jeremiah 33:14–16
Psalm 25:4–5, 8–9, 10, 14
1 Thessalonians 3:12 — 4:2
Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

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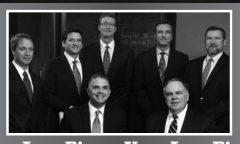

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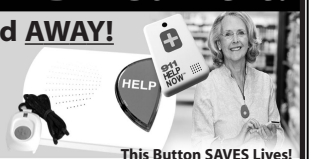

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