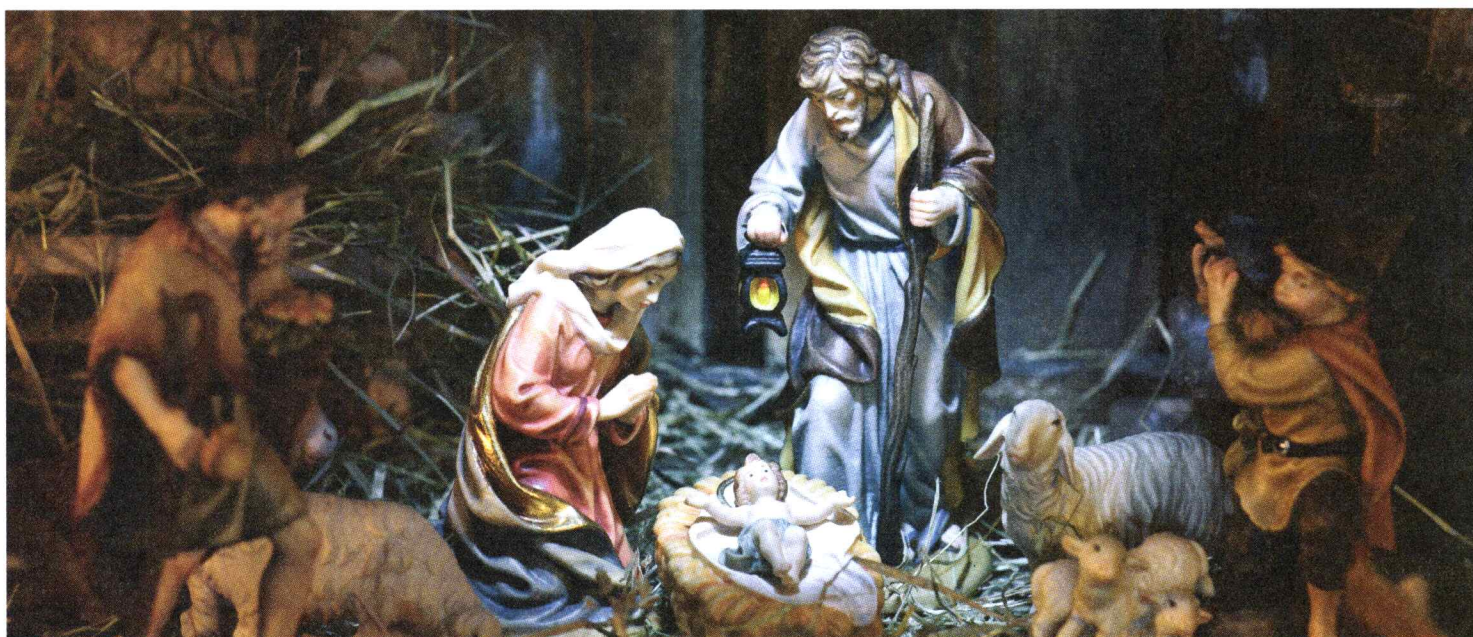


# Awaiting His Presence

## The Gift of the Lord

*Micah 5:1-4a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45*



**I**t is the last Sunday in Advent, and our spiritual journey is about to culminate in the celebration of Christmas. Today's readings are filled with joy and encourage us to reflect on how the gift of the Lord will impact our lives.

The first reading tells us that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem. The second reading reminds us that Jesus came into the world and was obedient to God's will. And the Gospel invites us into the intimate meeting of Mary, who will give birth to Jesus, and her cousin Elizabeth,

who will give birth to John the Baptist.

When Elizabeth sees Mary, the baby in her womb leaped for joy, and Elizabeth recognized that Mary would become the mother of the Messiah. When we pray the Hail Mary, we repeat Elizabeth's faith-filled words, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Lk 1:42).

Like Mary, who bore Jesus in her own body, we who are baptized are also a dwelling place for the Lord. Jesus comes to us in prayer, in the words of Scripture, in the priest and the people

around us at Mass, but in a unique and unparalleled way in his Body and Blood that we receive at the Eucharistic table. The gift of the Lord today, and every day, molds us, comforts us, blesses us, and challenges us.

"God's presence in our lives never leaves us tranquil: it always pushes to do something," Pope Francis reminds us. "When God comes, he always calls us out of our house. We are visited so that we can visit others; we are encountered so as to encounter others; we receive love in order to give love."

### POINTS TO PONDER

How do you recognize the gift of the Lord in your life?

Elizabeth knew immediately that Mary was blessed. How do we recognize holiness in other people?

In what ways do you bring the gift of Jesus to other people?



The first Christmas crèche was set up in a cave in Italy by St. Francis of Assisi in 1223. When people from the village came to see the manger with hay, an ox, and a donkey, St. Francis spoke to them about the newborn babe in Bethlehem. Take time during this Christmas season to visit the Christmas crèche in your parish church. Pray to the baby Jesus for your special intentions.

## THE NATIVITY SCENE



### *A Christmas Resolution*

Promise yourself that you will set aside some quiet time during the next two days to prepare a place in your heart for the Christ Child. Imagine yourself in the stable at Bethlehem. Picture yourself holding the Christ Child. Allow feelings of peace and joy to fill your heart.



### **The Not So “Perfect” Family**

When you think about the “perfect” family, the Holy Family might come to mind. If you’re thinking that your family could never compare, perhaps it’s time to take a closer look!

Put yourself in Mary and Joseph’s situation. Think about how difficult it must have been to take care of a newborn infant in an animal shelter. Think about the smells, the noises, the dirt, and the scratchy straw. Think about how helpless Joseph must have felt. Did he remember that he almost divorced Mary? Did he worry about how he was going to take care of her and the baby? Did he wonder how his life would change?

When you look beneath the surface of the Nativity scene, you see tensions, discomfort, worry, and fear. These are the same kinds of struggles modern-day families face. Spouses misunderstand each other. There are problems to overcome and decisions to make in daily life. People experience stress, discomforts, worry, and fear.

When you live through these kinds of difficulties with trust in God, you become holy in the same way that Mary and Joseph were holy. When you believe there is a purpose for your life, when you seek God’s will, when you raise your children to rely on God, when you reach out to other people with compassion, you become perfect in God’s eyes because you are living lives of love.

## *Advent Prayer*

*Lord God, open our hearts so that we can receive the gift of the Lord with peace and with joy. Help us see the many ways the presence of Jesus in our lives will comfort us, form us, bless us, and challenge us. Give us the courage to carry Jesus with us all the days of our lives. Amen.*

## FAMILYFOCUS

One of the best ways to prepare for Christmas is to read to your children the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus. You can find the stories in the New Testament: Matthew 1:18–23 and Luke 2:1–20.



Teach your children to sing traditional Christmas carols that celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Set up an interactive Nativity scene. Start with the stable and the animals. Place the figures of Mary and Joseph on the other side of the room, and then let your children move them closer to the crèche each day. On Christmas Eve, add Mary and Joseph, baby Jesus, the angels and the shepherds. Then let the Wise Men begin their journey so they can arrive on the feast of the Epiphany.