

January 1

The First Day of the Year

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” Luke 2:34–35

The deep significance of this, the first day of the year, is lost for most of the Christian world. This day marks when the eight-day-old Jesus received the Jewish covenant of circumcision, and His name Yeshua (Hebrew for “God saves”) was proclaimed for the first time.

The Brit Milah (covenant of circumcision) is a great celebratory event for a Jewish family, and Mary had certainly witnessed it before. But the mother of our God knew what the mohel did not. Her baby was born to rescue and deliver. He was the Messiah. In Mary’s heart, this was the most solemn event. Jesus’ circumcision began the trail of His shed blood. It would traverse thirty-three years to a hill in Jerusalem five miles from the place of His birth—and to all eternity.

Mary was always there for Him. From conception to the Cross, she stayed with Him, praying until the end. It is no wonder we pray for ourselves, “Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” She stayed faithfully with her Son through the hours of His (and her) agony until His expiring breath.

As we observe New Year’s Day, let us remember that the first day of the year marks the first time the Savior of mankind shed His blood for humanity. On the calendar day of Jesus’ circumcision, we also remember the solemnity of His mother, whose pure and holy heart was being pierced by a sword.

Prayer: O God, King of the universe, who became flesh for me that I might participate in Your divinity, help me, in the coming year, to know You more fully and love You more deeply. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Today, slowly pray the Hail Mary, pondering each word.

Deborah Kendrick

January 2

The Voice of My Beloved

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my dove, my fair one, and come away." Song of Solomon 2:10

Can you imagine the King of heaven and earth not only noticing you but also speaking tender words of invitation? "I see your heart, my fair one. I see your pain and joys. In this season of new beginnings, remember that with each breath you are given a chance to start anew—an opportunity to love more, pray longer, and come closer to My heart."

Maybe your resolutions tend to come and go. Perhaps this year it is time to move past making resolutions and, instead, commit to a relationship. There is someone out there to whom you belong; He yearns for you, His beloved. Will you keep Him waiting, or will you quench His thirst? Do not be afraid; your Lover is gentle.

If you find yourself burdened by your past mistakes or overcome by your present choices, allow Him into your life. Turn away from sin; look toward the eyes of your Savior. There is nothing you've done that He doesn't already know; His mercy is greater than your guilt. You are always His.

If you think a relationship with the King of heaven and earth is unattainable, remember this: our King humbled Himself and became one of us so we would realize how available and selfless His love really is.

He wants your heart—not just a part of it but your whole heart. Why do you resist? Fix your eyes on Him and allow yourself to be overcome by His goodness and love. Hear His voice calling to you. Will you respond to His invitation? Dear sister, I am praying that, bold in the Holy Spirit, you accept the grace to say yes.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, be with me. Shower me with grace and shine on me the light I need to follow Jesus the Bridegroom wherever He leads. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Make a good Confession. Prepare by thoroughly reviewing your conscience, and go early to the appointed time at your parish. After receiving the sacrament, offer a special prayer of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit for leading you to the arms of Jesus in the Church, His Mystical Body.

Angela Koenig

January 3

Supercop No More

If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. John 12:47

I'm the oldest daughter of the oldest daughter of the oldest daughter. When people ask why I didn't have children, I laugh and say that that line of hyper-responsible, hypervigilant women had to end. (I'm not entirely joking!)

Regardless of your birth order, you may have some of that gene. You know, the one that tells you there's one right way to fold towels and sheets, drive, wrap a present, or dress—and woe to those who don't agree with it. The problem with all that private and sometimes not-so-private condemnation is that when your expectations are that exact, you, those you love, and the world will never live up to them.

What's the point in even trying to please God then? If we can't live up to our own standards, how could we possibly meet His? It's all grace. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus offers us not only freedom from our failures but also healing from our sin and the hope of eternal life.

Yet, Jesus doesn't condemn those who choose not to follow His words. Imagine that! It takes away any power we've given ourselves to condemn. That means no snarky comment about the person with twenty items in the clearly marked ten-items-or-fewer lane at the grocery store or silent seething about the parent who doesn't take the crying toddler out of the sanctuary during Mass.

Jesus sets the perfect example: love, welcome, and accept people as He does. Offer the invitation to the Word, and leave the judging to the Father on the last day. Until then, do what Jesus did: provide gentle correction when the Spirit directs, and distance yourself from those who threaten your salvation—without condemning them.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for loving me just as I am. Teach me to be patient with myself and others. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Today, look for opportunities to be charitable. Before you judge someone, say a little prayer for them.

Melanie Rigney

January 4

Our Daily Cross

And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23

How beautiful to see our struggles as an opportunity to rely on God. John, the beloved disciple, wrote, "So we know and believe the love God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16). That simple affirmation of faith, coupled with my belief that God orders all for my good, never fails to bring me comfort. These truths relate to both the situation I can see as good and those circumstances where the goodness isn't quite so obvious.

In St. Luke's gospel, Christ tells us if we want to follow Him, we must pick up our cross daily. I've often found it funny that Luke, the physician, includes the word "daily." St. Matthew also shares Jesus' words of wisdom but leaves out the "daily" aspect. It reminds me of the adage "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Perhaps St. Luke is trying to teach us that carrying our cross each day will keep evil at bay.

Every morning I need to renew my decision to follow Christ and then ask for His help to persevere with my diet, budget, and path to holiness. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). That's the secret—in Christ. The strength comes from Him, and He's always ready to give. But I keep taking it back, thinking I can do it all, maybe afraid to use up all my prayers, like a genie lamp.

Struggles come and go. As long as we are breathing, we'll have them—be it our health, holiness, or family's financial well-being. The flesh is indeed weak, but God is strong: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). St. Paul wisely reminds us that Jesus' grace is enough.

Prayer: Lord, whether my cross be heavy or light, may I always yoke myself to You in carrying it. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Make a list of your crosses and contemplate how Jesus is trying to help you carry them.

Allison Gingras

January 5

Following Yonder Star

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." Matthew 2:1–2

I recently left my job in the Air Force after ten years of service and the arrival of our second child. Sometimes, Jesus asks us to take a great leap of faith and follow Him. I couldn't see the whole road map. Jesus gave just enough to illuminate the next step. It seemed God sent me full speed in one direction only to apply the brakes. The whiplash was stunning.

Imagine how stunning it was to the Magi when, after following a sign in the sky, the brightest star, they arrived at a stable. Faith is mysterious, sometimes sending us on strange paths. Were the Magi surprised when they came to such a humble shelter? Places of greatness may have a very ordinary appearance. Jesus' call may seem ordinary, but He calls us to a new way of life, which will take us on an extraordinary journey. He calls us to follow the Magi's footsteps to an even deeper relationship with Himself, a call that leads to a place of adoration.

Although the Magi brought gifts, the gifts they received were far more magnificent. My trust in God to leave the military was rewarded, but in a very unexpected way. Had I not left my job, I could not have been with my husband when he needed an emergency surgery. Following the star of God's inspiration sent me to a place wholly unknown, yet in the midst of suffering I received gifts, even profound peace.

Not all of us are called to quit our jobs, but everyone is on a journey of conversion to find true peace. Like the Magi, we must follow yonder star to offer our humble treasure to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, may I recognize the guiding stars in my life. Inspire my heart to remain faithful to following them. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Spend time today with the scriptures. Let the Holy Spirit guide your reading.

Katie Lee Taylor

January 6

Odd Gifts for a Newborn

They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD. Isaiah 60:6

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the Magi visiting the Christ child and bringing Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Upon hearing this, one has to think, “Odd gifts for a newborn.”

I once saw a plaque that said if the three wise men had been wise women, they would have “asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts.” Although the plaque was humorous (and probably true on many points), the Magi’s gifts were actually perfect for the newborn Jesus. These gifts fulfilled several key Old Testament prophecies (see Nm 24:17; Ps 72:10–11; Is 60:6).

Frankincense was used to make incense, myrrh was used to prepare the bodies of the dead for burial, and gold was the sign of the wealth of a king. As the baby who received these gifts was God Incarnate, they were perfect. Frankincense represents the prayers made to Him, myrrh points to the salvation He won for us on the Cross, and gold reminds us that this helpless newborn was the King of kings.

During the Epiphany, Christ appeared as God-with-us to the Magi. Today, He appears to us, too. And like the Magi, we can give Him our gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Perhaps our gold is the relationships we hold dear, the activities that bring us the greatest joy, the things we love most—all offered freely to our God. Our frankincense may be the prayers of praise and adoration that we lay before Him. And our myrrh may be our sufferings, the many deaths to self that we must face on this journey. We can bring all these gifts to the altar as we go forward to receive the greatest gift of all—the source and summit of our faith, the Eucharist.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the gifts that You have given me. Help me to use these gifts to build up Your kingdom on earth. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Give someone the gift of your presence today. Make a point to be attentive to them.

Kelly M. Wahlquist

January 7

The Power to Heal

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

When I was a struggling actress on the fringes of the industry, I had an opportunity to create a one-woman act for a performance-art venue. The act, which was well received, was about a creature that survived by feeding on the “fruit” of human emotions. This creature lamented the ready availability of toxic emotional fruit like self-pity, resentment, hopelessness, and rage, and wished for the day when she might feast on forgiveness, mercy, and hope.

The inspiration for this act came from my longing to bring healing to people. When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach salvation “to every creature,” He also said, “They will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16:18). As an actress, I’d become especially aware of how desperately people need healing. I used to spend hours people-watching in New York, especially on the subways. Everywhere I looked I saw people who seemed alienated, heartache and loneliness etched into their faces. How I wished to lift their burdens with an act of my will, healing their broken hearts. I liked to imagine their looks of surprise and delight, their eyes sparkling at the miracle of renewed hope.

Today, I teach classes on authentic beauty for teenage girls—and it is so rewarding to see them experience healing from their fears, resentments, and anger. They come to recognize the stunning dignity of the feminine genius—that they are receptive, sensitive, generous, and maternal. And as they heal, they see the healing potential of their own lives.

We are called as the Father’s daughters to receive people where we find them, being sensitive to their condition, generous in our response, and maternal in sharing our wisdom. We are to bring healing to the people God places in our path each day—one moment, one act of kindness at a time.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love everyone You place along my path each day—extending one act of kindness at a time. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Today, consider what gifts you have to offer others.

Lisa Mladinich

January 8

Perfect Love

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. 1 John 4:18

One night I lay in bed, unable to sleep. I was overcome with anger at someone who had broken my heart. And now, I was facing a ruined relationship and financial devastation. I had no idea what to do or which way to turn. I knew that such consuming anger and fear were not from God, but I felt powerless to control my emotions. I cried and begged God to help me. Then a gentle, steady voice spoke in my heart: “Ask Me for My perfect love.” I blinked. “What?” “Ask Me for My perfect love.” I was stunned. “What does that mean?” I asked.

“Look, Lord, sure, I want Your perfect love, but I have this problem, and I need help.” I waited and prayed for help, but nothing else came to me. “Fine,” I said, exasperated. “Give me Your perfect love.” Heaving a sigh, I prayed again. “Really, Lord, give me Your perfect love.”

I don’t know how many times I repeated that prayer that night, but I suddenly realized that I had stopped shaking. My fear and anger were gone. You’d think I’d feel relieved . . . but I panicked and tried to pull those feelings back up. Somehow, I thought the negativity was necessary to deal with the problems I faced. But despite my best efforts, the fear and anger weren’t there anymore. The severity of the situation hadn’t changed, but now it no longer crushed me. Before long, I fell asleep.

In the morning, I awoke refreshed, rested, and curious. “Why did that prayer work?” I asked God. In reply, a scripture verse floated gently into my head: “Perfect love casts out fear.” Today, I use that prayer in every difficult situation—from finances to health to relationships—it’s positively miraculous!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, restore my trust in You. Give me Your perfect love, that I may see all things in its light. Amen.

Respond to His Call: If anything, or anyone, is causing you to doubt the faithfulness of God, give the Lord permission to take your perspective and to replace it with His.

Lynne Keating

January 9

Five Smooth Stones

And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. . . . So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone. 1 Samuel 17:49–50

In scripture we encounter people with some crazy ideas. Take the story of David and Goliath. What was that crazy kid thinking? None of the Israelite warriors were brave enough to face the giant—but David picked five smooth stones, hurled one with his sling, and the giant fell.

I heard a possible meaning for the five smooth stones. Four of the stones represented courage, confidence, preparation, and trust. The fifth stone, which he used to slay the giant, signified faith. What excellent tools for battle. David put the stones in his shepherd's bag. We could use our purses, briefcases, or diaper bags—or throw them in the passenger seat of the car!

Who are the Davids today, and what Goliath are they going after? We could start with the Goliath of woundedness. The world is bruised, individuals are aching, and the Church has scars. It doesn't seem there is a way to tackle it all. But we don't need to. We just need to begin.

I think women in the New Evangelization are Davids. The WINE website reads, "For such a time as this, the Lord is calling to women, asking us to work in the beauty of our natural gifts as women, and is saying to us, 'Heal my body.'" This David and Goliath business is serious. Let's choose the five smooth stones of courage, confidence, preparation, trust, and faith, and carry them in a satchel marked Mercy!

Prayer: Lord, equip me for battle with courage, confidence, preparation, trust, and faith. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Today, collect five smooth stones. Put them together in a vase to hold flowers for a centerpiece for a table, or perhaps heat them and use them as hand warmers in the cold. Whatever you do with those stones, let them be daily inspirations to take small steps of faithfulness toward whatever battles you're facing.

Alyssa Bormes

January 10

Remodels Are Not for Wimps

Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:23

I love makeover shows featuring experts who take old, dilapidated homes and turn them into warm, comfy living spaces. Maybe some of the appeal is that these shows parallel my own work. As a life coach, I love to inspire and guide others to open the closets and sort through the mess of their emotional and spiritual lives, decluttering and bringing beauty into those interior spaces. It can be painful. Some people resist the change. Some make progress, only to sneak old habits back in.

Do you know why it's so difficult to let go of clutter? We fear that we will never have enough and so we hoard what we think will keep us in control. What tremendous energy we spend purchasing, storing, managing, and maintaining it all—only to worry about theft, floods, fires, or a breakup. The same holds true with relationships. How exhausting to be overly involved, micromanaging, and fighting fears of failure, rejection, and abandonment!

God is a master remodeler. He wants to restructure and beautify our interior lives, working with our natural desires to bring order from chaos and holiness from selfishness.

So, ready for a makeover? Make an honest assessment of your life. Open every door to every room, and invite the Lord in. Tell Him your desires, hopes, and greatest fears. Allow Him to draw you into Himself, making you new and beautiful.

Once you open all the doors, our Lord will take over and make His dwelling place in every area of your life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to hold the goods of the world and all my relationships in right order. Fill me with more of You so I need less of everything else. Amen.

Respond to His Call: Spiritual and emotional decluttering is not for the faint of heart. Today, do some research into finding a trustworthy and qualified coach to help you.

Rose Sweet