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ADVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
—— *with* ——
THE SAINTS

Anthony F. Chiffolo



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To Rusty and Lisa



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DAY 1

*The time is surely coming, says the LORD,
when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.*

*I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.*

*I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them,
says the LORD your God.*

AMOS 9:13–15

O God of Promise!

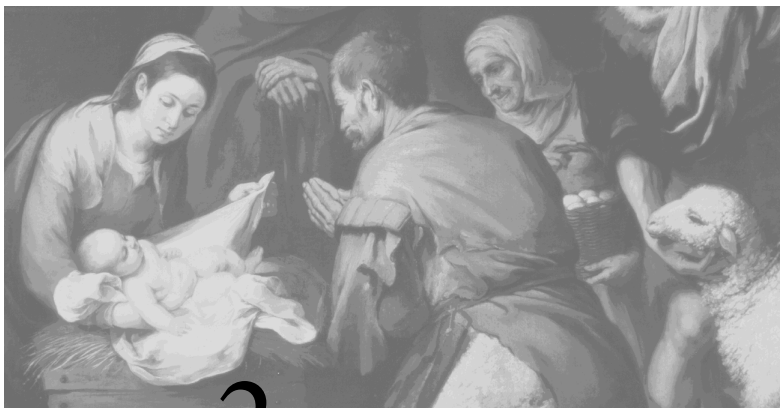
Thus was I taught by the grace of God that I should steadfastly hold myself in the faith as I had before understood it, and that I should seriously believe that all manner of things would be well, as our Lord at that same time had showed me. For by the great deed that our Lord shall do He shall save His word in all things and He shall make well all that is not well—though how it shall be done no creature below Christ knows or shall know until it is done. This is what I understood from what our Lord communicated to me at this time.

SAINT JULIAN OF NORWICH (1342–141?)



This is the day that you have made, O God of Promise, and your psalmist has instructed me to be glad in it. For like all days, today is a day of possibilities, and if I allow it, your loving Spirit will reveal the day's magnificence. Yet today is also a day of special promise, for it is the beginning of my Advent pilgrimage, my preparation for the Incarnation of your loving Spirit in the Messiah. As I proceed on this pilgrimage, help me perceive where I need to rebuild, revise, replant, and restore. Help me remove what is blocking my vision of you, reaffirm my commitment to love, and rejoice in the goodness of creation. And help me remember that your loving care will make well all that is not well in my life, transforming my Advent efforts into a journey of glory. Amen.





DAY 2

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

MALACHI 3:1–4

O God of Purification!

The Jews solemnized a day called by them *dies ignis*, the day of fire with which Nehemias consumed the sacrifice, upon his return with his countrymen from the captivity of Babylon. Even so, and indeed with more reason, should Christmas day be called the day of fire, on which a God came as a little child to cast the fire of love into the hearts of men. “I came to cast fire on the earth.” So spoke Jesus Christ, and truly so it was....

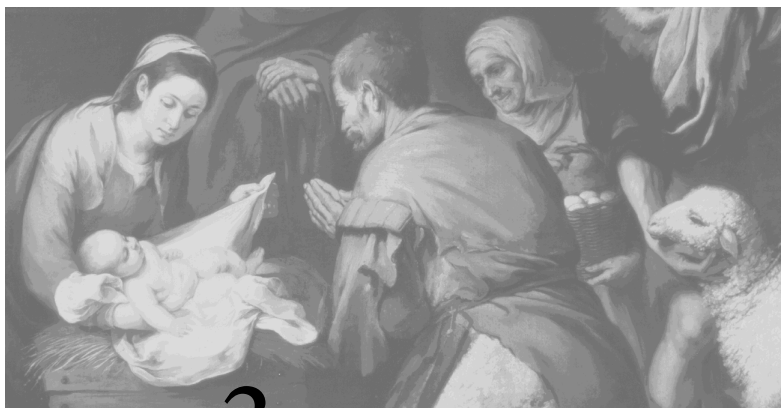
It is a custom with many Christians to anticipate the arrival of Christmas...by fitting up in their homes a crib to represent the birth of Jesus Christ; but there are few who think of preparing their hearts, so that the infant Jesus may be born in them.... Among these few, however, we would be reckoned, in order that we too may be made worthy to burn with that happy flame which gives contentment to souls on this earth, and bliss in heaven. Let us consider...how the eternal Word had no other end in becoming man than to inflame us with his divine love. Let us ask light of Jesus Christ and of his most holy mother, and so let us begin.

SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI (1696–1787)



O God of Purification, here I am at the beginning of my Advent journey, yet already I feel overwhelmed with holiday anxieties. O Living Flame, refine my to-do list, that I might put first what I must do to welcome you into my life once again. Clarify my desires, that I might undertake only what you call me to in this season. And purify my intentions, that I might begin right now to put myself under your loving guidance. Amen.





DAY 3

Six months later, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary.... Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, “Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!”

Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel’s greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You’ll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus—‘Deliverance.’ His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have never been with a man?”

The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you—

hence the offspring to be born will be called the Holy One of God. Know too that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a child in her old age; she who was thought to be infertile is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God."

Mary said, "I am the servant of God. Let it be done to me as you say."

LUKE 1:26–38

O God of Possibilities!

I will abandon myself fully to the Holy Spirit, allowing myself to be led wherever and whenever the Spirit wants, accompanying the Spirit, for my part, with effective and strong resolutions and serious discernment.... The Holy Spirit descends upon us with great gentleness, never with a racket.

SAINT FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI (1850–1917)



Dear God, why do I await a telephone call, a letter, an e-mail, or even an angel to announce your intentions? I am so afraid of responsibility, for my decisions, my actions, my very words and thoughts might lead me to catastrophe. O God of Possibilities, teach me to recognize that your Spirit is already quietly at work in my life. Help me trust that your Spirit is already informing my decisions, guiding my actions, and forming my words and thoughts. I pray that, with your grace, I might bravely cooperate with you in bringing your infinite possibilities into reality. Amen.





DAY 4

Within a few days Mary set out and hurried to the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what Our God said to her would be accomplished!"

Mary said: "My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior...."

LUKE 1:39-47

O God of Rejoicing!

When John leaps for joy Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, but we know that though Mary's spirit rejoices she does not need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Her son, who is beyond our understanding, is active in his mother in a way beyond our understanding. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit after conceiving John, while Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit before conceiving the Lord. Elizabeth says: *Blessed are you because you have believed.*

You also are blessed because you have heard and believed. A soul that believes both conceives and brings forth the Word of God and acknowledges his works.

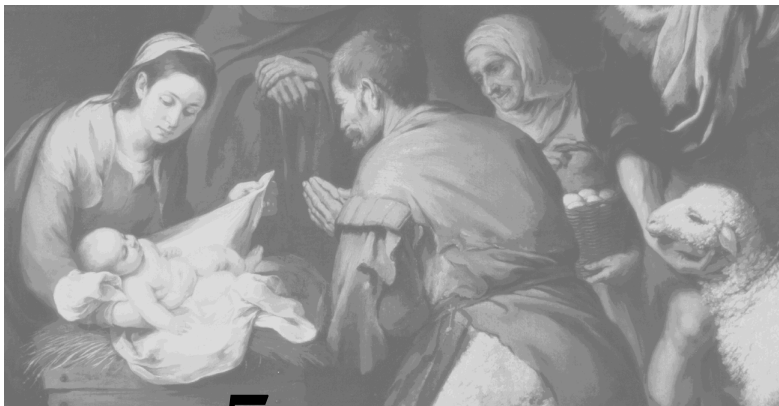
Let Mary's soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. Let her spirit be in each to rejoice in the Lord. Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith.

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN (C. 340–397)



Just as Mary desired a sign to verify the presence of the Divine within herself, so I too sometimes need outward signs to remind me that God is present within. O God of Rejoicing, open my heart, that I might recognize the fortuitous signs you have placed before me. Touch my soul, that I might respond with rejoicing to the wonders of your abiding love. Most of all, infuse me with your Spirit, that I too might bring forth the Word of God into the world. Amen.





DAY 5

*The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water...
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,*

*rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.*

PROVERBS 8:22–31

O Sophia!

You, O eternal Trinity, are a deep sea, into which the more I enter the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek. The soul cannot be satiated in your abyss, for she continually hungers after you, the eternal Trinity, desiring to see you with the light of your light. As the hart desires the springs of living water, so my soul desires to leave the prison of this dark body and see you in truth.

O abyss, O eternal Godhead, O sea profound, what more could you give me than yourself! You are the fire that ever burns without being consumed; you consume in your heat all the soul's self-love; you are the fire which takes away cold; with your light you illuminate me so that I may know all your truth. Clothe me, clothe me with yourself, Eternal Truth, so that I may run this mortal life with true obedience, and with the light of your most holy faith.

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347–1380)



O Sophia, I long to drink from your eternal well. My soul is an arid place, in need of God's life-giving Spirit: quench my thirst, so that my desert might bloom. My soul is a frozen place, in need of God's blazing love: warm my heart, so that my winter might thaw. My soul is a dark place, in need of God's shining wisdom: open my eyes, so that my sight might be restored. Give me a clear vision of my way back to God, along with the courage and strength to continue the journey. Amen.

