

Encountering THE SEASON

ADVENT *for the FAMILY*

THE
THIRD WEEK
of ADVENT

PREPARE

A father and mother's love is often considered and called unconditional. Our parents love us, even when we aren't the easiest to love. They love us through our mistakes and struggles. So powerful and strong is God's love for us that it's almost incomprehensible. God's love is truly unconditional, and his mercy is endless. There is nothing that we can do—no sin that we can commit—that God won't forgive. God is constantly pouring out his love and mercy for us.

This Advent, as we wait for the coming of Christ, let us remember that it was because of God's unconditional love for us that he gave us his Son. As we decorate for the Christmas season with garland, ornaments, and gifts, let us make sure that we also build in our hearts a place for Christ. When lighting the third Advent candle this week, may we recall God's love and find ways to make our homes reflect that love.

Challenge of the Week

Find ways that you can help your family decorate the house for Christmas, creating a loving home for Christ. When setting up a Nativity set in your home, consider having everyone add a piece of hay, straw, or cloth to Christ's manger so that when Christmas comes, he'll have a soft resting place.

Songs of the Week

"Love Song for the Bride" (Brother Isaiah) / **"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"** / **"Vox Clara Ecce Intonat"** (see translation by St. John Henry Newman) / **"Praeparate Corda Vestra"**

Prayer

Recast, O Lord, my heart within your flame,
Rebuild me as a tower to brave the dark
And let Your light take up its home in me,
A beacon to each lone and wayward bark.
Grant that each lost, oppressed, and weary soul
May find safe harbor in my own heart's port
And find fit welcome after roaming far,
Their ships come safely home within your court. Amen.

Words of Wisdom

"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged."

(James 5:7-9)

Week 50



THE ROSARY IN A YEAR

WITH FR. MARK-MARY AMES, CFR

PHASE 3: MEDITATING ON THE MYSTERIES

The Glorious Mysteries in Art

THE ASSUMPTION

"A woman clothed with the sun, ...
and on her head a crown of twelve stars"
(Revelation 12:1).

This week, we will meditate on a piece of sacred art depicting the Assumption: an eighteenth-century fresco in the Church of Santa Maria dell'Orto in Rome. After taking a moment to collect your thoughts and lift your mind to God, prayerfully gaze upon the image, noticing what catches your eye and what intrigues you. Points of reflection have been provided to assist in your meditation.



Ceiling fresco by Giuseppe and Andrea Orazi (1706),
Church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, Rome

Reflection and Contemplation

- One interpretation of Revelation 12, John's vision, is that Mary is referenced as "the woman." "And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). What might the twelve stars represent?
- See the serpent or dragon below Our Lady. How is she part of God's plan to defeat Satan (see Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12)?
- Notice the little cherub thrusting a spear at the dragon with a smile on his face. This cherub looks more like a baby than a warrior, yet he is shown vanquishing the Enemy. How does God often use the lowly to overthrow Satan?
- Notice how some of the angels have musical instruments, as if there is music being played as Our Lady enters heaven, body and soul. Though we may not all play instruments, how can we praise God more in our lives?
- We can see God the Father and the Holy Spirit as a dove. Why do you think Jesus is not pictured?
- Notice the different kinds of fruit in the gold framing the painting. What do you think these fruits represent? How was Our Lady's life fruitful? How can our lives bear more fruit when we imitate her?

Make It Your Own

What stood out to you about your Rosary experience this week?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Scan the QR code to view *The Rosary in a Year* videos on the Ascension app. Download the prayer plan at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8s69yd>.

The Rosary in a Year is a daily podcast, produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mark-Mary Ames, CFR. It takes Catholics on a journey to form a lasting habit of prayer and gain tools to enter more deeply into meditation on the lives of Jesus and Mary through the Rosary. This bulletin was adapted from the podcast and materials that complement the podcast.

Sunday Q&A

Your Faith in Focus



ADVENT BEDTIME PRAYERS

Is there a particular way to pray in the “homestretch” leading to Christmas?

The closer it gets to Christmas, the busier our lives get. We call it “hustle and bustle.” At the same time, we want our hearts to enter into the season. Are you looking for some particular ways to pray? Is there a simple, actionable tradition in our Catholic heritage that can help? Yes! Today, we offer the O Antiphons as a fulfilling way to enter into the “homestretch” of soulful preparations for Christmas.

Participating in the Liturgy

On December 17, the Church begins the second part of Advent, in which we focus more intensely on the immediate preparation for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord—Christmas. The Masses and liturgy of these days are rich and beautiful in their scriptural content. In many nations, it is traditional for the faithful to attend Mass early in the morning during the entire last week of Advent, praying in the cold darkness for the Lord to come on the Holy Night as the Light of the nations.

*“Glory to God in the highest!”
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*

The O Antiphons

Perhaps the most beautiful and mysterious aspects of the late-Advent liturgy are the seven O Antiphons, which place before us scriptural titles of Christ found in the Old Testament. Each night at Vespers and also in the Alleluia verse of the Mass, the coming Messiah is hailed with a different title: O Wisdom, O Adonai and Leader, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dawn from on High, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel. We contemplate the beauty of the Word of God, shining into the darkness of sinful humanity, and with all our hearts, we ask him to come and set us free.

During these final days of Advent, the darkest days of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, let’s pray with all our hearts that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, may set us free from fear and enable us to hear anew the song of the angels on the Holy Night: “Glory to God in the highest!” *Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*



Ponder and Pray

- How has this Advent been so far in terms of prayer and spiritual preparation? (Don't panic if the answer is "Not great.")
- Which of the O Antiphons seems to strike you most deeply? Why?

Make It Your Own

Here are the O Antiphons for the last week of Advent. Pray them slowly and ask the Holy Spirit to stir a holy longing in your heart.

December 17

O Wisdom of our God Most High,
guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!

December 18

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19

O Root of Jesse's stem,
sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!

December 20

O Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21

O Radiant Dawn,
splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

December 23

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!

Tip of the Week

Beginning December 17, put these antiphons by your bedside and pray them each night before bed.

Dive Deeper

For the full article with other recommendations for prayer, scan the QR code or visit: <https://media.ascensionpress.com/2023/12/18/praying-scripture-last-days-advent/>





FLOWERS SHALL BLOOM, WE SHALL REJOICE!



Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10 • James 5:7–10 • Matthew 11:2–11

Family Car Talk

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul says, *"Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged."* Talk with your family on the way home from Mass about this verse.



How can we do better as a family about complaining? What can we do instead?



Sometimes, the people we complain about the most are our family members. What are some ways we can commit to building each other up instead of tearing each other down?



One way to combat complaining is by practicing gratitude. Share three things about your family that you are most grateful for.



UNSCRAMBLE THESE WORDS FROM TODAY'S GOSPEL

ONJH _ _ _ _ _

OODG SNWE _ _ _ _ _

EMGSENRES _ _ _ _ _

EPREARP _ _ _ _ _

OINKDMG _ _ _ _ _

EVHANE _ _ _ _ _

EDTSRE _ _ _ _ _

B

COUNTING FLOWERS IN THE SAND

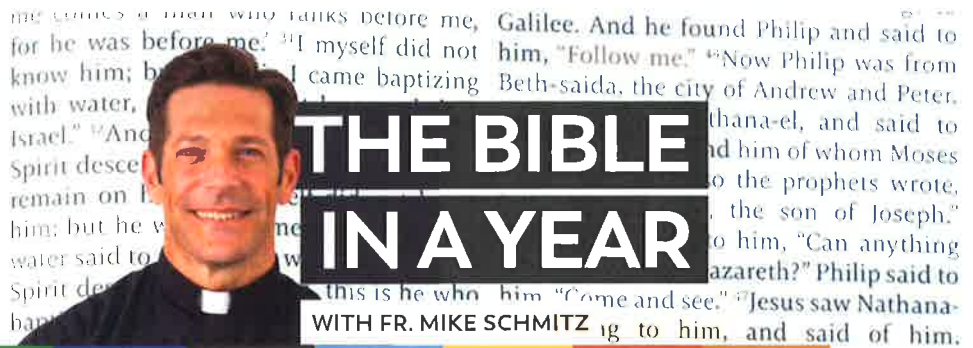
Instructions: Today, on Gaudete Sunday, the First Reading says, *"The desert ... will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song."* Count the number of flowers and then color them using as many colors as you can!



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Week Fifty

Days 344–350



The Church Narrative: Acts 23–28; James 1–2

Supplemental: 2 Corinthians 12–13; Galatians 1–6; Ephesians 1–6; Philippians 1–4; Proverbs 29:8–30:6

THE COMPLEX IDEAS AND SIMPLE LOVE OF PAUL



Saint Paul Writing His Epistles
by Valentin de Boulogne

The stories related to St. Paul's imprisonment and eventual transport to Rome in Acts show the many ways Paul refuses to ever despair or falter in his faith. The set of readings from his letters helps us to understand the complexity of his ideas while still being rooted in the simple gratitude and fervor he has in his love for God, who has saved and redeemed him. The reading from the beginning of St. James' epistle emphasizes that our faith must be active and obedient to God's will, just as we see in St. Paul's life.

- After his arrest in Jerusalem, St. Paul preaches to the Roman official Felix and his wife, Drusilla. For two years, Paul remains in prison, and Felix periodically summons him to discuss the Christian faith. Felix does not convert, though, and he keeps Paul imprisoned for political reasons.
- Like other figures recounted in the Scriptures, we are reminded that it is not enough for us simply to believe; we need to act on what we believe. We need to respond in obedience to God and embrace the relationship he establishes with us.
- Finally, in Acts 25, Paul lays claim to his Roman citizenship and appeals to Caesar. He continues to preach and minister to those around him, even as a prisoner on his way to Rome.
- The guidance St. Paul offers in his letters to many churches is just as important today as it was to their original audiences. For example, in the letter to the Galatians, St. Paul must counteract those who teach the necessity for Gentile members of the Church to keep aspects of the Jewish Law, such as circumcision. Paul argues forcefully and convincingly that God's grace supersedes such requirements. A Christian is free of such commandments.
- Then, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians. He uses every opportunity, even imprisonment, to spread the Gospel.
- He teaches the Ephesians about the complementary relationship of husbands and wives, who have different roles but share equal dignity.

- A husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, sacrificing himself for her benefit.
- In Philippians 2:10–11, Paul reminds us that we must never use the name of Jesus thoughtlessly or carelessly.
- James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, writes, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). It is Jesus who justifies us, but we cannot merely profess faith and then continue to act as people without faith.

Dive Deeper

Today, pray for the grace to live out the fruits of the Spirit. Choose one particular fruit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 and do your best to live it out this week through your prayers, actions, and words.

Bible Answers

Is St. Paul an apostle of Jesus?

Yes. But how can this be since he was not one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus during his public ministry? Following Judas’ betrayal and death, the apostles choose Matthias to replace him. In Acts 1, we see that one of the requirements is that the new apostle must have been a witness to the Resurrection of Jesus. Is Paul a witness to the Resurrection? Actually, he is.

In his letters, Paul offers a “defense” of his call to be an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 15:8–10, speaking of Jesus’ Resurrection, he writes, “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he [Jesus] appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles ... But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Here, he refers to Jesus’ appearance to him on the way to Damascus, described in Acts 9. In this way, Paul is a witness of Christ’s Resurrection and is rightly considered an apostle.



SHIPWRECK AT MALTA

This image shows St. Paul's Island, Malta, the traditional site of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta, described in Acts 27–28.



Scan the QR code to listen to the *Bible in a Year* podcast on the Ascension app, to get exclusive content, and to access transcripts for every episode. Download the reading plan at <https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/>.

The Bible in a Year is a daily podcast, produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mike Schmitz, where we read the whole Bible following *The Great Adventure* Bible study program created by Jeff Cavins. This bulletin was adapted from *The Bible in a Year Companion* books that complement the podcast.

Week 50

Paragraphs 2683–2745



THE CATECHISM IN A YEAR

WITH FR. MIKE SCHMITZ

How We Pray PART FOUR: CHRISTIAN PRAYER

HOW DO WE ADVANCE IN PRAYER?

The Church teaches that “prayer is a battle,” primarily with our own inclinations and with the temptations that divert us from union with God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2725). We should set daily times for prayer and persevere in difficulties. Growth in prayer is God’s work; we cooperate with the Holy Spirit through grace and effort. God already knows and wants what is good for us, but he wants our participation. Prayer allows us to know God’s heart and become more like him. We must be willing to cooperate with God’s work in prayer, allowing him to transform our hearts.

Keep in Mind

- Ideally, families teach us how to pray and overcome distractions and boredom in prayer.
- Spiritual directors can also teach us to pray.
- Everyone has access to the Holy Spirit as a spiritual director.
- Vocal prayer expresses our hearts through words, emphasizing the connection between body and soul.
- Jesus engaged in vocal prayer, offering both praise and anguish.
- Meditation is a focused effort “to understand the why and how of the Christian life” (CCC 2705).
- The Bible, books by saints, lectio divina, and even elements of nature can aid meditation.
- Meditation helps us internalize the teachings as wisdom of our own.
- “Contemplative prayer seeks him ‘whom my soul loves’” (CCC 2709).
- Instead of focusing on reading or teachings, contemplation focuses solely on Jesus.
- Even in difficult circumstances, we can “always enter into inner prayer” and the presence of God (CCC 2710, 2711).
- Silence is a crucial element in contemplative prayer.



The Italian Chapel
in Orkney, Scotland

Dive Deeper

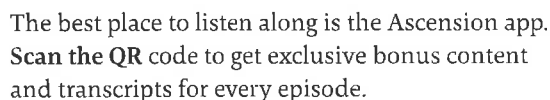
A church is “the proper place” for public worship in liturgy and for individual prayer and reflection (CCC 2691).

It is important to consciously choose time for prayer. This week, commit to specific times when you will pray.

- Use the space below to reflect on this week's content.

God our Father, thank you for initiating prayer in our lives. Send your Holy Spirit to make us pray-ers who persevere with trust and humility. Help us trust you when we are distracted, in pain, and challenged. Teach us who you are and how to pray. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.



The *Catechism in a Year*[®] is a daily podcast produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mike Schmitz. By reading the entire *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Fr. Mike helps us understand what it means to be Catholic and allow those truths to shape our lives. This bulletin was adapted from the books that complement the podcast: *The Catechism in a Year Companion*, volumes 1–3, by Petros Willey, Fr. Mike Schmitz, and Matthew Doeing.

Encountering the Word

with Jeff Cavins

Third Sunday of Advent (A)

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10 • Psalm 146:6–7, 8–9, 9–10
James 5:7–10 • Matthew 11:2–11



Do Our Actions Show Authentic Faith?

This week's readings center on authenticity—how our actions reflect the truth of our beliefs. In the Gospel Reading, John the Baptist, imprisoned and uncertain, sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). Jesus responds with more than a simple word of affirmation—he points to his works: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive the Good News.

This response mirrors Isaiah 35, where God's presence is marked by transformative deeds of healing and justice. The implication is clear: Authentic faith is demonstrated through action, not merely through words. Authenticity as followers of Christ requires us to embody our faith through concrete acts of love, mercy, and service. The world will know we are Christians by the way we care for the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the marginalized. It's not enough to profess belief; our faith must bear fruit.

As we journey through Advent, let us reflect on how our actions align with our beliefs. Are we living lives that point others to Christ? Are we preparing not only our minds for his coming, but also our hearts and hands as well? By aligning our deeds with our faith, we participate in God's plan of salvation and become authentic witnesses of his love.



Living the Gospel

Jesus responded to John's question by pointing to his works: the blind see, the lame walk, and the poor hear the Good News. This Advent, reflect on your actions: Do they reveal Christ to the world? Focus on concrete acts of love and mercy—caring for the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Let your deeds be a testimony of your faith and a preparation for Christ's coming. Take this week to align your actions with the Gospel. Reflect on Isaiah 35 and Matthew 11 for inspiration.

Dive Deeper

Scan this code to watch:



Or go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX2xIfKKo0U>

Ponder and Pray

- » How do your actions reflect your faith in Christ? Consider specific ways your daily life embodies Christ's love and mercy. Are there areas where your actions could better align with your beliefs?

- » When faced with uncertainty, how do you reaffirm your faith? John the Baptist sought confirmation of Jesus' identity in a time of doubt. How do you seek reassurance and remain faithful during times of spiritual questioning?

- » How are you preparing your heart and life for Christ's coming during Advent? Beyond external preparations, how are you spiritually aligning your thoughts, habits, and actions to welcome Jesus authentically?

“ **Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.**
– Isaiah 35:10 ”

Make It Your Own

You and others in your household may use this space to write anything about today's Mass. It might be your view of Jeff Cavins' reflection, your priest's homily, your answers to the questions on this page—anything to help you and your household get the most out of today's Mass.