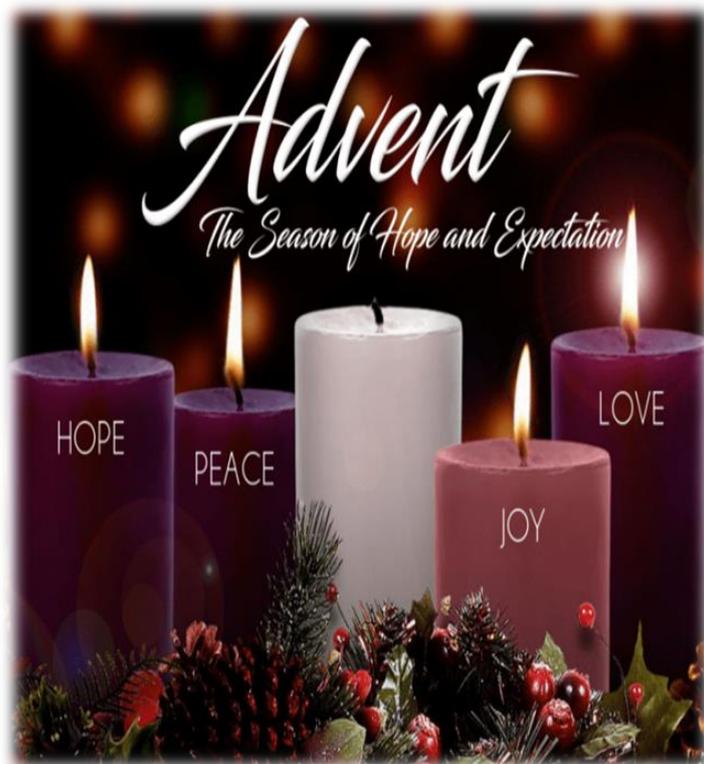


Something  
Different for  
Advent 2021

MY ADVENT RETREAT  
*Busy Person's  
Retreat*



#SDFA2021

A collection of short prayers, reflections and exercises based on the Gospel of each  
Sunday for **BUSY PEOPLE**  
to help aid you on your Journey through Advent

May God's blessings this season, light your way!



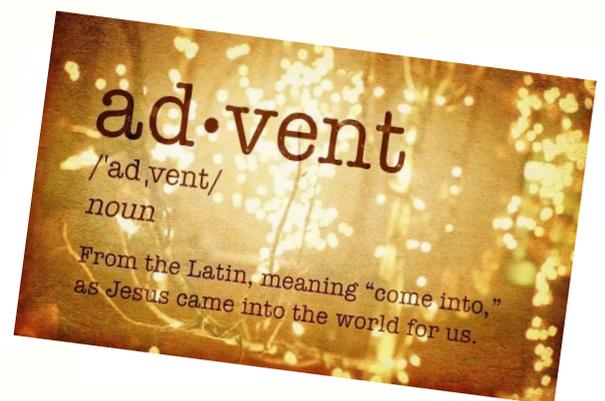
**The season of Advent** always has had strong significance every year but this year that seems to be stronger, needed and timely. This journey which we take together focusing on Hope, Love, Joy & Peace is needed and welcomed. Christmas is good news. After a tough year, Christmas brings comfort and joy to you and to a world that is weary, hurting and trying to get back on it's feet. The message of the baby born in Bethlehem is that God is in the mix. God does not stand far off, watching from a distance. God comes to us, walks with us and stays with us; in our messy-ness and our busy-ness. Make a bit of time for yourself in the midst of this to hear your God who walks this journey with you.

**So** this simple retreat is a collection of short prayers, reflections and exercises based on the Gospel reading for each of the Sunday's to hopefully help aid you on your Journey through Advent to Christmas – Take your time, go at your own pace and stay with each moment as long as you need.

As you get ready for this busiest of seasons, consciously make a promise to be gentle with yourself, to make a bit of time but to give it your all and to be open to where the journey may lead you.

### Prayer in the Days before Advent

Lord,  
Advent is here, but so is family tension.  
Advent is here, but so are dysfunctional relationships.  
Advent is here, but so are old habits.  
Advent is here, but gone are people we love.  
Advent is here, but old baggage still exists.  
Advent is here, but fears surface.  
You say, "I see all that, and I can handle all that."  
You say, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."  
You say, "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid."  
You say, "Tell everyone who is discouraged, Be strong and don't be afraid! God is coming to your rescue... "  
What looks unscalable, You boost me over.  
What seems unbearable, You bring me through unbelievably.  
What can't be managed, You say, "Let down your guard and I will guard you." Amen.



Look at your Advent Calendar – just a few days until you can open the first door! Give a jump for joy or fist bump your family at the excitement of looking forward.

# First Sunday of Advent ~ 28<sup>th</sup> November

Be alert at all times



**Our focus for this first Sunday of Advent is 'Learning to Wait'.**

*Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.*

Welcome to the **first week** of our Advent retreat. Each week these reflections and suggestions will be a guide for you to spend some more time in prayer and reflection throughout Advent. It is also an opportunity to focus in on the Advent themes each week and to take some 'time out' each day.

**We begin** our Advent retreat by allowing ourselves to take stock of our busy-ness. The season seems to shorten every year – Halloween is over and the very next day the Christmas ads are on television and Santa is on his way to the local supermarket. The pressure is put on as predictably as drawing up a shopping list, stressing over presents and finances, decorating the tree and planning the Christmas Dinner. We need to gift ourselves a few minutes out from our hectic world each day and to give ourselves a little space and time. Let these 5-10 mins each day be your gift to yourself as you prepare for Christmas. In the Gospels we are told that Jesus frequently goes away to a quiet place to pray, to escape the crowds, to spend time with God. This is a good place to start.

## Tasks ~ Week 1

**Firstly** you are invited to create a simple sacred space in your home. This could be in the corner of your bedroom or sitting room. It should be somewhere that you can go for some quiet time each day. You may use some symbols in your space – such as a cross, candles, a bible or some significant symbol for you. The colour for Advent is **Purple**, a symbol of hope, so you may like to use that colour in your sacred space. **Evergreens** speak of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal. **Candles** symbolize the light of God coming into the world, the light still burning in our world & hearts today. Maybe make your own Advent wreath? *Be creative, yet keep it simple.*



**Secondly** some people like to carry something with them during the weeks of Advent, like a little piece of purple string or ribbon. This is a reminder of the things that tie you down, preventing you from living as freely and as fully as you can. Also the tradition of *string on the finger* was designed to "keep" the thought there, to be remembered later when it was needed. Let it be a reminder for you this Advent of God's love for you. Make a point of taking it out at least once every day and hold it in your hand. By the end of the four weeks you will know every part of it as you will know your inner self. You can place the string/ribbon in the sacred space each night as a symbol of giving your burdens to God and as an expression of thanks for your day.



**Thirdly** it's always good to journey with a companion. Pick a friend or family member that you will make a special effort to call to mind and remember in prayer as you go through this Advent journey. Don't tell them (*unless the two of you have decided to make the retreat together*) but let them be your prayer companion. Let your piece of ribbon remind you to bring them to prayer each day.



# ARE YOU READY?

*The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide.*

*You can do some of them or all of them.  
Take your time – you have a full week.*

## Prayer suggestions for the week

1. **Breathing exercise:** Try to do this at least once a day. Be still. To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing; a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world. Repeat the following: "*Come, Lord Jesus, Come*", for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of God who is with you always.
2. Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times (**LK 21:25-28, 34-36**). Come back to it a few times during the week.

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catches you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man



- Sit with the text, and pick a word or phrase that stands out to you. In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind.
- Why is that word or phrase relevant to you at this moment? What feelings does it evoke?
- Is there something that puzzles or disturbs you? Why? -What is it calling you to do?

### Consider this

Waiting. We're not very good at that anymore. Maybe we never were. We get frustrated if we have to wait for any length of time. Waiting feels like time wasted and who can afford to waste time these days? But maybe a little waiting is a good thing. Here are five things we can get from waiting that are worth reflecting on.

Serenity and inner beauty come when we wait upon God. 'Waiting' like that is not merely wasting time.



1. **Waiting reminds us that we are not the centre of the universe.** Waiting gives us the opportunity to remember that other people have plans and priorities as well. We are not the focal point of the universe. That doesn't make our plans unimportant, but it does put them in perspective.
2. **Waiting reminds us that God is in control.** At the very least, waiting forces us to realize that we are not in control. And that can be a valuable opportunity to reflect on who is.
3. **Waiting reminds us that life is a gift.** Forced to sit at a stop light for several precious minutes, I have a choice. I can choose to grumble and gripe about the loss of my precious time, or I can remember that those very minutes were a gift God gave me. Sure, this wasn't how I'd planned to use them. But that doesn't change the gift.

4. **Waiting reminds us that the present matters.** Sometimes we can be too future-oriented, always focused on what comes next. But what about now? Next is in God's hands. Now is what we have.

5. **Waiting reminds us that the future is bigger than we think.** We have a finite amount of time, why waste any of it waiting for things to happen? Waiting can remind us that this life is part of something much larger and teach us to value the time, relationships that we have. Waiting can teach us to be involved and not a spectator in life!!

(Adpt from Mark Cortez)

### Prayer for the week

Lord teach me to wait. May I wait in hope and may my hope be in you, amen.

## Second Sunday of Advent ~ 5<sup>th</sup> December

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*

**Our focus for this second week of Advent this year is**

*'Preparing with Peace'.*

*Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.*



Welcome to **Week 2** of our Advent Retreat. How are you doing? Did you manage to create a sacred space for yourself last week? If not, don't worry, you can still do it with some candles, symbols, evergreens, the colour purple for Advent! How is your piece of string/ribbon holding up?

This week's **task** is to make space and time **each day** to be quiet and reflective. It is only when you stand back from the daily busy-ness that you can see things more clearly. **Gift** yourself some time! In the Gospel this week we are encouraged to be prepared ~ So take time to prepare yourself for the busy day ahead or maybe take time at night to prepare yourself for a restful sleep giving thanks for the day. Be aware of God who walks with you always. Decide what is best for you – ten minutes in the morning or evening? While out walking? If you have time to do that at least one day this week, great!

### **Prayer suggestions for the week**

- Breathing exercise:** When you come to prayer - *Be still*. Take three deep slow breaths, hold... then let go. Then, focus on your normal breathing. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift of breath and life. Repeat the following: *In you, oh Lord, I rest my soul*, for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of the God whose love envelops you.
- Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times (**Luke 3:1-6**). *Come back to it a few times during the week*

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:*

*A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

- Sit with the text and pick a word or phrase that stands out to you. In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind.
- Why is that word or phrase relevant to you at this moment? What feelings does it evoke?
- Who is preparing the way of the Lord in our community, our world today? How are you preparing?
- Who are the voices crying out in our communities, in our church, in our world today?
- What hope does this passage awaken in you today? How is it calling you to prepare?

*Maybe as these weeks progress, keep a **Diary/Journal** of your significant thoughts, prayers, feelings & inspirations and come back to these. You'll find yourself encouraged as you see your expectation, relationship & trust in God increase.*

*The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide. You can do some of them or all of them. Take your time – you have a full week.*



## Consider this

What if this Advent, we allow ourselves to imagine a life that is different? A life that recognises God at work in all aspects. How different would our life be? If love was the first principle, if we lived by love, how would our community, our world be different? The prophet always points to a better time. Maybe that longing in the most hidden corners of our hearts is something holy, a desire for a deeper relationship with God.

We might squirm at that and stammer all of the excuses we know: *Not now. I'm really busy. I've presents to buy and bills to pay. I'm not a very holy person. God's good for Sundays. God's only for the older generation. I'm going to get to a serious relationship with God as soon as my kids are gone... when I don't have to care for my parents; when I get the promotion at work; when we move to a new house; when there is more time...* There are dozens of ways we can evade the issue, but still, that longing is there for something more.

Advent is a time to recognise both our holy longing and the healing love God has for us, despite the many barriers we put up between ourselves and God. We can start simply and just rest at the edge of our beds in the mornings, open our hands and whisper, "**Come, Lord Jesus!**" If we let ourselves feel what is in our hearts, we know they are filled with love. We can carry that experience with us as we go through even the busiest of our days. We may not know exactly where to begin or how to fill this longing in our hearts but it is simple. God waits with infinite love and with arms outstretched to meet us. The words we say don't matter. We can speak as if God is a friend we have not seen in a long time, but one with whom we can sit in a comfortable silence. If we took time to recognise God at work in our lives, what difference would our Faith then make to our everyday lives; How better our world would be? How much more would we feel, understand and be agents of real peace.

*(Adapted from Creighton University's Online Ministries Praying Advent)*

## Suggestions for the Week

At the end of each day, before you close your eyes, give a few minutes of loving attention, making yourself present to the Lord as someone who was graced by him during the day.

- **Thank** God for everything that was good for you, for your family and for your community.
- **Invoke** the power of the Holy Spirit, asking for light to discern how to make the right choices, how to decide wisely.
- **Be Aware** of the situations, circumstances, and events of your day in which you allowed God to act, to be present in your life. Review your actions that were signs of God's presence and love for others.
- **Ask for forgiveness** for wrong choices made, opportunities missed and for chances lost.
- **Entrust yourself**, the day gone and the coming day to the Lord and experience the joy and hope that come from putting all these matters into God's hands.

Dear God ♥  
I've tried my best, but  
if today I lose my hope  
Please tell me  
that Your plans are better  
than my dreams

**Dress for Advent:** *Why not make a conscious choice to wear Advent colours at least one day this week?*



## Thought for the week

Peace is so much needed in our world today; it is so much envied and sought after. Am I a peaceful person?

Does peace begin with me? Peace with others begins as we understand that God has called us to be peacemakers in our world. Is there somewhere in your own world where you can be a peacemaker this Christmas? Is there an invitation that needs to be extended to smooth over a fractured family relationship? Is there an apology to be made or a silence to be broken that has stood as a barrier for too long? Don't miss the blessing God promises in your life as you respond to his call to be a peacemaker in your own circle.

We can help bring peace to our world one heart at a time. Beginning with our own!

## Prayer for the Week

*I believe in God, but do I believe in God-in-me? I believe in God in heaven, but do I believe in God-on-earth? I believe in God out there, but do I believe in God-with-us?  
Lord, be born in my heart. Come alive in me this Christmas! Amen*

## Third Sunday of Advent ~ 12<sup>th</sup> December

What should we do?

**Our focus our 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Advent this year is 'Waiting in Hope'.**  
*Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.*

You are now on **Week 3** of our Advent Retreat. How did you get on last week? Did you wear your Advent colours? Did you notice anyone else wearing theirs? If not maybe try to do so this week and remember today is *Gaudete Sunday* so the colour this week is **Rose** for JOY! How is your piece of string/ribbon holding up? Have you been writing thoughts, inspirations in your journal?

This week's task is to Notice – Take 10 minutes at the end of the day to see the signs of Hope all around you. *(You may want to look at your life journey).* In prayer ask God to bring to mind experiences that day, whether large or small, through which you have sensed genuine love, genuine care, genuine compassion. People might come into your memory, or places where you felt welcomed and restored, or particular events. Write down a word or sentence in your journal/notepad that captures that time, without going into details; as the next memory comes write something down about that and so on, so that you end up with a long list of moments or memories. Most of these points of connection will be ordinary, everyday things. When you've finished spend some time looking at your completed list. Reflect with God about the shape love takes: how love practically expresses itself and brings Hope. **Be open to be surprised!**



### Prayer suggestions for the week

- Breathing exercise:** As you have been doing for the past two weeks, focusing on your breathing: take three deep slow breaths, then focus on your normal breathing. Do this for as long as you can. Build up the time each day to reach 5 mins (or more). This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift. Repeat the following slowly: *"Be with me Lord, clothe me in your presence"*, for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of God who is with you and loves you always.
- Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times (**Lk3:10-18**). Read it a few times – come back to it again during the week parts can be tough!! ***Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments.***

*And the crowds asked John the Baptist, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.*



- **What then should we do? ... What then should you do? What is the Gospel asking of you?**
- **What is holding back, blocking God's love for you? What do you need to let go off?**
- **Is there a fire burning within you? How can you ignite this flame in others?**
- **What change does this passage call you to today? What is the Good News you proclaim?**

### Consider this

Sometimes life just hurts. I wish there were a more delicate way to say that. I wish there were a clever way to explain this fact away – maybe some whimsical cliché that we can all have a chuckle over? But I've got nothing. The truth is there are days when the burdens of life can weigh on us so heavy that we're not sure how we'll lift it, much less carry it around. Around the middle of December it can be easy to be swept up in the holly, jolly tide of Christmas cheer. If life has dealt you a good hand, it's a quite enjoyable time of the year. But if life has dealt you a bad hand, if you have lost a love one during the year then that tide of Christmas joy can feel like it's drowning you. What do we do with this? For starters, we can call to mind that Advent is a season for people who are in darkness waiting for the sort of light that will save them. You can't commercialize or turn a profit on this sort of thing. Living in darkness and waiting for a great light isn't very easy to market either. Maybe that's why it's so easy to forget (or avoid) this reality when we're rushing through the season's numerous to-do lists. Author Taylor Caldwell writes, "I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all, and that, of course, is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent, for this is still the time God chooses." This season is still the time God chooses to bring the world's greatest hope into the very darkness of life that can seemingly weigh us down every day. There is, indeed, hope for those who live in darkness. May we stand in solidarity with those for whom darkness is an all too familiar reality this season. May we experience and share this light together. And maybe, just maybe if we look through the chaos, the pain and the struggle we see our true hope, the child in a manger.

(Adapted from *Hope in the Darkness: An Advent Reflection for Those Struggling With the Holiday Season*. By BGosden)



### Suggestions for the week:

- **Hope is an action more than a feeling.** We remember the works of God in the past and so anticipate the work of God in the future, leading us to act purposefully in the present. Ask God to show you an action you can take as an expression of hope, whether this in relation to your own circumstances, or someone you care for or the community or the church you are part of. Do at least one *act of random kindness* each day!
- Sometimes it helps to physically act out the walk of faith, a walk of hope. - Fix a point in the near distance that symbolically represents a place you sense God is inviting you to move to in faith. Now walk slowly to that point noting the fears, hopes and energy that arise as you do so. At your arrival point, talk with God about what it feels like to be there. Now retrace your steps to where you began. This time turn away from your destination and walk slowly in the other direction. What do you feel as you do so? Talk with God about this. Now repeat your journey back to your faith destination for a second time. What do you feel? What do you learn from this exercise?



### Thought for the week

**Plug into your parish/Faith Community.** We draw strength and hope from our community of faith! Every parish/faith community has Advent and Christmas liturgies and celebrations (*like the daily Mass liturgies, Services, Worship, Advent Reconciliation services, etc*), and they also have other seasonal activities. Engaging in them as a family (*if possible*) will help you keep Christ in the centre, and it will also help you to help others to keep Christ in the centre. Never underestimate the support you give to others. You are building up your community of faith by participating in these liturgies and activities!! Why not see how you can get more involved? Find out if there is a group or ministry you could bring your gifts to. Take the risk!

### Prayer for the Week

*Lord, I put my trust in you, I rest my hope in you.  
Keep my mind focused on you, my heart filled with you & outstretched to you, Amen*

*The reflections and suggestions on these pages are meant as a guide. You can do some of them or all of them.  
Take your time – you have a full week.*

Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ 19<sup>th</sup> December  
... when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my  
womb leaped for joy



**Our theme for our last week of Advent is 'Waiting with Joy'.**  
Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing.

You are now on our final few days of our Advent Retreat, Christmas is nearly here. Well done! How did you find get on last week? Did you notice the many shapes God's love for you takes throughout each day? Any surprises? Did you find out more about the events, ministries in your parish? Hopefully your piece of string/ribbon is not too ragged by now, remember to say a small prayer of thanks each time you hold it. Are you remembering your prayer companion? How is your prayer space looking; what have you added to it over the weeks?

**This week's task is to complete a simple Action each day – This is usually one of the busiest weeks of the year but make a conscious decision to do one simple thing for someone else each day for these days to Christmas. Maybe do something special for your prayer companion. Suggestions could be –**  
*Light a candle and say a prayer for a loved one far away; to take a special treat to a neighbour; Make a card for a loved one and send it in the mail; Recycle some toys to share with others; Read a Christmas book to your child; Make a small stocking and drop it off on someone's door as a surprise; Write a Thank You letter to someone; Take food to a local food bank; Write a list of **10 things** you are thankful for this year and share it with a loved one...* If you find it easier make a list of things that you would like to do in your journal, put it in your prayer space and tick them off and bring them to prayer as you do them. Bring that joy to others. Be creative!

Listen with your heart Visit a sick friend  
Clean a neighbor's walk Offer a hug  
Give an unexpected gift Make a new friend  
Pick up litter Say "hello" Open a door  
Plant a tree Help carry a load Share a snack  
Cheer up a friend Thank a teacher or mentor  
Read to a young child Lend a hand Do a kind act daily  
Leave a thank you note Offer your seat  
Cycle courteously BE TOLERANT Let another go first  
Bake cookies to share Give a compliment  
Help a student make friends Donate your gently used items  
Give a balloon away Lend a pencil Respect others

### Prayer suggestions for the week

- Breathing exercise:** Hopefully by this stage you have worked up to 5 minutes or maybe 10 minutes with the breathing exercise. Continue this week to take some time each day to be still.
  - Take three deep slow breaths and then focus on your normal breathing. This is the breath of life. Thank God for this gift. When you breathe in you are bringing energy and life to your body. When you breathe out, you are giving a gift to the world, feeding the plants and the trees, playing your part in nature. Stay with these thoughts as you breathe.
  - Repeat "*Come, Lord Jesus, my Joy rests in you*", for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of God who is with you and loves you always.
- Read **Sunday's Gospel**, two or three times (**Lk1:39-45**). It's one we know very well. Read it a few times – come back to it again over the next few days. **Is there something about the story that maybe you never noticed before? Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments and let its meaning sink into your heart.**

*In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

### Think of things you are thankful for

- Blessed are you – YOU ARE BLESSED! Do you let yourself believe this, really feel this?**
- In what ways has the Lord visited you, your family, and your community? How are you asked to be the 'Christ-bearer' to others?
- What is this gospel challenging you to do, to be?

### Consider this

Twentieth Century industrialist W. J. Cameron once said "there has been only one Christmas. The rest are anniversaries." It's a time for keeping the memory of God's greatest gift alive in our hearts... In recent years many people have expressed concern that Christmas has drifted far from its religious roots. We have also witnessed an attack on religious displays in public places while watching the corporate world hijack the Christmas celebration as an excuse to sell their latest wares. Massive traffic jams, packed shopping malls, and lines stretching around the block have become hallmarks of today's Christmas activities. Ad campaigns for holiday sales can lead to pandemonium as shoppers are knocked down and trampled in their frantic efforts to buy the latest gadget. However, I suggest this is a good time to reflect upon the distinction between what we want and what we need or what we give instead of what we get.

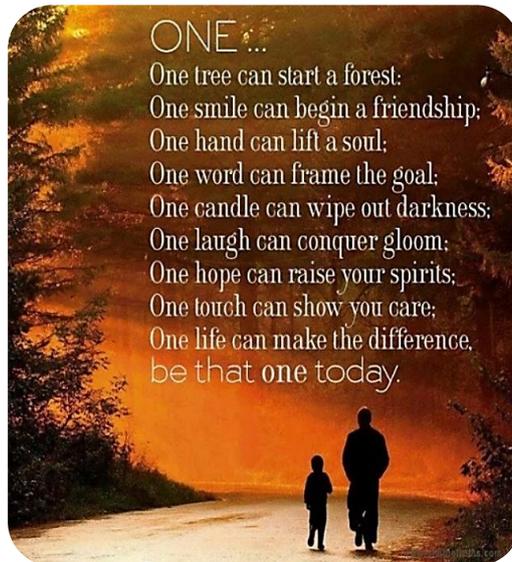
The true value of a gift isn't necessarily measured by its price tag. In fact some of the most precious gifts cost nothing at all... and can be life changing. Many people simply need to be loved, listened to, or appreciated. Some gifts, such as taking time to listen to someone who is hurting emotionally or giving a word of encouragement, can make a tremendous difference in a person's life and bring joy to the giver. This holiday season consider how our community would be affected if everyone looked for opportunities to give someone a life-changing gift for Christmas. As Helen Steiner Rice wrote; "Bless us Lord, this Christmas, with quietness of mind; teach us to be patient and always to be kind." May we receive this most precious of gifts ourselves and be that gift for others!

(Adapted from: Christmas; *A Time for Joy, Reflection, Reverence and Tradition* by D. GARY DAVIS)

#### A Reflection - The Power of One

##### Mary – her yes, our yes

One song can spark a moment,  
One flower can wake the dream.  
One tree can start a forest,  
One bird can herald spring.  
One smile begins a friendship,  
One handclasp lifts a soul.  
One star can guide a ship at sea,  
One word can frame the goal.  
One vote can change a nation,



One sunbeam lights a room.  
One candle wipes out darkness,  
One laugh will conquer gloom.  
One step must start each journey,  
One word must start each prayer.  
One hope will raise our spirits,  
One touch can show you care.  
One voice can speak with wisdom,  
One heart can know what's true,  
One life can make the difference,  
**You see, it's up to you.**

**A few thoughts going forward** – Hopefully you have found this simple Advent retreat helpful, enjoyable and useful. After the busyness of Christmas is over **Gift** yourself a New Year's resolution to continue or carry on at least one aspect of this into your future. It may be the 10 mins reflecting on each day & bringing it to prayer, carrying a reminder in your pocket, spending time with the Sunday Gospel, continuing to write in and come back to your prayer journal, getting involved in your parish, consciously carrying out *Random acts of Kindness ... be aware of God who is with you and loves you always!*

#### Prayer for the next few Days

Lord, this Christmas, let my heart be touched by your gift of love  
and my life be your witness.

With joy and confidence I pray, 'Come Lord Jesus Come.' Amen.



Merry Christmas





The light of the  
Christmas star to you.  
The warmth of home  
and hearth to you.  
The cheer and goodwill  
of friends to you.  
The hope of childlike  
heart to you.  
The joy of a thousand  
angels to you.  
The love of the Son and  
God's peace to you.  
— Irish Blessing

