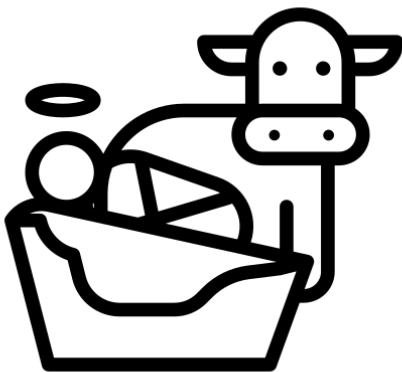


Nativity Trail



*An Advent Journey with
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph*

Devotional For Families
www.catholicprouts.com

Written by Nancy Bandzuch
Edited by Megan Swaim
Cover Art by Annie Vaeth

PRINTED IN USA

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright 1989, 1993 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

*“The Holy Family
is the beginning of
countless other holy
families.”*

St. John Paul II
Letter to Families

The Nativity Trail:

Advent Devotional for Families

The Gospels show Jesus praying 25 different times. Sometimes He raises His eyes to heaven and gives thanks to God. One time, He teaches His disciples a new prayer. Most often, however, we hear that Jesus leaves His followers and prays to God in private.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus prayed during those private moments? Did He get on His knees? Did He speak out loud or speak to His Father in the silence of His heart? Did He sing? Did He dance?

Although we don't know much about the way Jesus prayed, we do know this: when Jesus prayed, He used the Psalms.

The Book of Psalms in the Bible includes 150 Hebrew prayers in the form of poems or songs. Most of the Psalms were either written by King David or written by others in the same style King David used. The Psalms are beautiful and moving and they express all that we experience as daughters and sons of God: Praise of God, Faith in His Goodness, Hope in Times of Danger, Lament over Sin, Joy after Forgiveness, Trust in God's Power, and Victory over Evil.

Jews, both at the time of Jesus and today, use the

Book of Psalms as their prayer book, but how do we know that Jesus did this too?

Because we hear Jesus pray the Psalms in the Gospel!

In fact, Jesus prays Psalm 22 just moments before He dies on the Cross. Hanging there in agony He declares, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" In that moment, the words that best expressed His anguish were the Psalms.

This prayer from the Cross tells us that Jesus prayed the Psalms often and that He probably memorized them as a child. We can also safely assume that Jesus grew up hearing His parents singing and reciting the Psalms everyday in their home in Nazareth.

The Psalms were, very likely, how Jesus prayed.

But Jesus wasn't just a faithful Jew, He was God, the long-awaited Messiah, come to save His people. Therefore, when Jesus prayed the Psalms, He also fulfilled the Psalms. When Jesus spoke the Psalms, He revealed the full meaning of these prayers and fulfilled all that they longed for.

As you pray through the Psalms this Advent, you will hear a couple of recurring themes and one of those themes is the longing for a Messiah. God had promised to send a Savior to His people, and through all the long years of terrible kings and exile, the Jewish people had clung to that hope. That hope echoes through the Psalms. Therefore,

when Jesus prayed and sang these songs,
He was singing about Himself and fulfilling the
promise God made to His people long, long ago.
He was the Messiah the Psalms begged for. He
was God's answer to their cries for help!

And so, we invite you to journey through the
Psalms with us this Advent. Listen to these prayers
with fresh ears. Strive to hear the Psalms the way
Mary and Elizabeth heard them as they prayed
during their pregnancies. Strive to feel what
Joseph felt when he recited the Psalms as he led
Mary down the Nativity Trail, the long road from
Nazareth to Bethlehem. Strive to pray the Psalms
as the entire Jewish Nation did all those long
years of exile.

And finally, strive to hear the words of the Psalms
in a new way on Christmas, the day we celebrate
the fulfillment of all these promises and longings:
the day that Jesus entered the world to save us.

Directions of Use of this Study

We invite you to use this study as a PRAYER with your family each day of Advent. Here is how we suggest you structure that prayer.

1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.
2. As a family, sing the first verse of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”
3. Prayerfully read the day’s Psalm aloud. *see note*
4. Give each person a chance to share one line from the Psalm that they heard (optional).
5. Read the reflection.
6. End with prayer. *see note*
7. Place that day’s medallion on the Nativity Trail Poster. *see note*

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

Additional Notes

Before you dive in, we invite you to read through these notes so that your family can enter into this devotion with total confidence.

READING THE PSALMS

We pray that this meditation serves as a beautiful introduction to the Psalms. For centuries, the Psalms have been a daily prayer for the Church. Religious and lay people pray the Psalms each day with the Liturgy of the Hours. In fact, we chose each day's Psalm from one of the psalms recited on that day in the Liturgy of the Hours. So when you pray this devotion with your family, you are joining with the faithful and religious all over the globe who pray the Liturgy of the Hours each day. With this devotional, you will be participating in the 'prayer of the Church'. Pretty cool, right?

As you go through this devotional, we invite you to pray the Psalms in a way similar to how Psalms are prayed in a monastery. Psalms are divided into stanzas. Pick two readers, and have the two readers take turns reading stanzas, alternating back and forth. To facilitate this we invite you to print an additional copy of this book. The digital version of the book was included with your purchase.

IMAGINATION BASED REFLECTIONS

A quick word about the reflections included with this devotional.

For this devotional we tried to crawl inside the minds and hearts of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Anne, and Joseph. These individuals were real people, placed in pretty remarkable situations. Mary journeyed 100 miles on the back of a donkey and slept outdoors on rocks and in pastures when she was 9 months pregnant! Elizabeth had a baby when she was an old, old woman! Joseph married a woman who was already pregnant and he had startling dreams where angels spoke to him! Have you ever wondered what it was like to experience these things?

Let's spend this Advent imagining what these individuals thought and felt. Each individual is a beautiful example of Faith and total Trust in God, even in impossible situations, and they can be incredible teachers for us.

In these reflections, we worked to focus on the ordinary moments that filled the days of Mary and Joseph: meals, sleepless nights, daily work, and days spent traveling. What was it like to live out the extraordinary will of God in the midst of ordinary life?

Scripture includes some beautiful stories of the time before Jesus was born, but a lot is left out. We aren't told how individuals felt or what they said to each other. However, we know that they were called to do many of the normal things that we do. While Mary carried Jesus in her womb, she

still had to cook, hang laundry, and travel. Imagine with us those quiet, hidden moments not included in the Gospel. What was it like?

We intentionally began each reflection with the words, “Imagine what it might have been like when...” We did this because we want it to be totally clear that this is a prayerful exploration that expands on Scripture. We wrote these reflections so that you can connect with the people and the stories leading up to Jesus’ birth in a more full and authentic way. Allow your imagination to join with ours as you explore the very real world that Jesus entered, and the real people that God used to fulfill His promises.

ENDING PRAYER

It is our goal to engage the minds and hearts of your whole family, even the youngest. Because of this, we have added two elements to the daily meditation that non-readers will be able to participate in: the opening song and the concluding prayer.

Each day ends with a simple prayer. The first sentence addresses the theme of that day’s Psalm. The second sentence is the same each day. It is, “We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!” After all, it is our hope that this study will help your family welcome Jesus with open hearts on Christmas day!

NATIVITY TRAIL POSTER

Finally, we plan to engage the hearts of the youngest with a fun, creative countdown to

Christmas that helps you recall all that you have prayed about. The Nativity Trail Poster is a simple 2 page printable that was included with the purchase of this devotional. The Nativity Trail is the actual name for the path that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Bethlehem. If you ever find yourself in the Holy Land, you can actually hike that exact path! Our printable is a rough map of that journey.

To prepare for Advent, simply print out the pages, tape them together, and hang them up. Within the digital documents, you will also find medallions that children will be invited to hang on the map each night. These medallions come in full color or as coloring pages. We pray that this simple activity will help your whole family really journey with Mary and Joseph this Advent, and prepare for the birth of our Lord.

You can also find the digital materials at www.catholicsprouts.com/nativitytraildownloads

ADVENT: DIFFERENT LENGTH EACH YEAR

Advent is a funny season. Unlike Lent, Advent can be anywhere from 21 to 28 days, depending on what day of the week Christmas falls on that year. Since we wanted to make a resource that can be used any year, no matter how long Advent happens to be, we have included 29 different meditations--one for each possible day of Advent and Christmas Day.

Here is how to use this devotional. For the first three weeks of Advent, simply follow along, using

one meditation a day. Then, in week four, start with the Sunday meditation, but jump ahead to the “Christmas Eve” meditation if need be. For example in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 the 4th week of Advent will play out like this:

2020

Sunday: 4th Sunday of Advent

Monday: Monday of Week 4

Tuesday: Tuesday of Week 4

Wednesday: Wednesday of Week 4

Thursday: Christmas Eve

Friday: Christmas Day

2021

Sunday: 4th Sunday of Advent

Monday: Monday of Week 4

Tuesday: Tuesday of Week 4

Wednesday: Wednesday of Week 4

Thursday: Thursday of Week 4

Friday: Christmas Eve

Saturday: Christmas Day

2022

Sunday: 4th Sunday of Advent

Monday: Monday of Week 4

Tuesday: Tuesday of Week 4

Wednesday: Wednesday of Week 4

Thursday: Thursday of Week 4

Friday: Friday of Week 4

Saturday: Christmas Eve

Sunday: Christmas Day

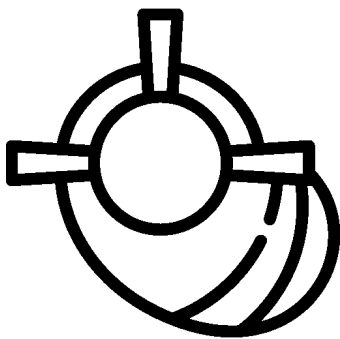
2023

Sunday: Christmas Eve

Monday: Christmas Day

*“Advent is a journey
towards Bethlehem.
May we let ourselves
be drawn by the light of
God made man.”*

Pope Francis



Sunday of Week 1

Psalm 63:1-4

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no
water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

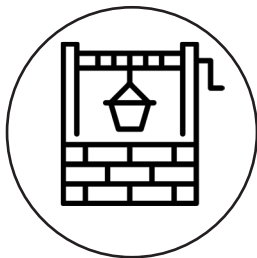
Imagine...

Let's imagine what Mary might have experienced growing up in Nazareth.

Water sloshed from side to side as Mary lugged a bucket from the well back to her home. Her veil slipped from her head and the afternoon sun glared down upon her. Rounding the corner, she spotted an old woman lugging her own bucket.

Mary set down her bucket and hurried to the old woman. "Please, let me help you," she said as she wrapped her arm around the old woman and took her bucket. Returning to the well, Mary once again drew water and filled the old woman's bucket. Then Mary cupped some of the fresh cool water in her hands and brought it to the lips of the old woman. The old woman drank and smiled at Mary.

My soul thirsts for you!



Prayer

Eternal Father, You alone can quench the thirst of my soul.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Monday of Week 1

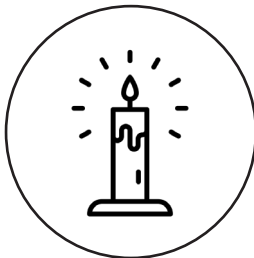
Psalm 15:1-3

O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;

who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

Who may dwell on your holy hill?



Imagine...

Let's imagine what Mary might have experienced at the Annunciation.

Mary lay in her bed, watching a candle flicker. In the next room, she could hear the gentle breathing of her parents as they slept. Through the window came the peaceful night sounds of insects and animals.

Suddenly, a great wind filled the room. The candle blew out, but the room was flooded with brilliant light. Terrified, Mary sat up in her bed and pulled her blankets to her face. An angel with a radiant face stepped toward her. "Greetings favored one," the voice of the angel boomed. "The Lord is with you."

Confused, Mary looked around. The Angel smiled at her tenderly and said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Trembling, Mary nodded. "Let it be done to me according to your word!"

Prayer

Eternal Father, dwell in me and teach me to be Christ to the world.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Tuesday of Week 1

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

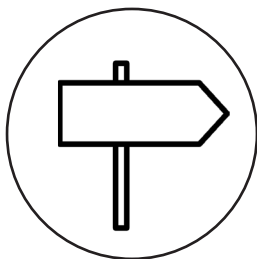
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what Mary's journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth might have been like.

Mary gazed out at the green hills and the sheep that dotted the horizon. Still miles from Elizabeth's house, Mary found some shade beneath a tree, and sat down. A stream trickled down the hill and Mary watched a sheep take a long drink. Nearby a young lamb frolicked through the tall grass. Mary smiled, but her focus returned to the dirt path that twisted up a hill and onward to her cousin. Standing, she felt the hand of the Holy Spirit on her, urging her on in haste to visit her cousin. God, her shepherd, was leading her forward.

He leads me in right paths.



Prayer

Eternal Father, guide me and teach me to trust in your plan for my life.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Wednesday of Week 1

Psalm 27:1-5

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

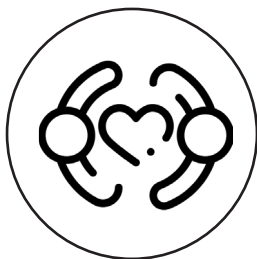
Imagine...

**Let's imagine what it might have been like
when Elizabeth greeted Mary.**

Elizabeth rushed out to greet her cousin. They clasped each other and stared with wonder into each other's faces. Mary bent and kissed Elizabeth's womb, and Elizabeth, feeling the baby within her leap for joy, knew at once the great plan of God. Her cousin, this simple girl from Nazareth, would be the Mother of her Lord. Amazed, Elizabeth pulled away. How could this be? Who was she that the very Mother of God should come to see her?

But Mary smiled and pulled her cousin closer. There were no answers. The future was unclear, and yet Mary's heart swelled with utter joy. God Himself dwelt within her. Unable to contain this joy, Mary broke into song as happy tears ran down her face.

To behold the beauty of the Lord.



Prayer

Eternal Father, light my way and teach me to fear nothing because You are at my side.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Thursday of Week 1

Psalm 32:1-7

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no
iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of
summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the
Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters
shall not reach them.

You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what Elizabeth might have felt as she waited to meet her child.

Each time the baby kicked in her womb, Elizabeth recalled those long years of emptiness and waiting. How many times had she called out to God for a child? How many times had she cried herself to sleep, wondering why God had not answered her prayers? She had been tempted to despair, and yet, even in the darkest moments, she clung to her Lord. She had remained faithful. Pausing in her work, she rested her hand on her stomach and imagined the child God had sent her. Her heart cried out to God, thanking Him for hearing her and delivering her.

You surround me with glad cries of deliverance.



Prayer

Eternal Father, hide me in Your power that I might cast all of my troubles on You.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Friday of Week 1

Psalm 51:1-4, 9-12, 15-17

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.

Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be
pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not
despise.

Imagine... **Let's imagine what Zechariah felt when his son was born.**

Zechariah's chest ached when he recalled the way he had doubted. Standing there before the blazing presence of an angel, he had failed to believe that God could make him a father. And yet, here he stood now, outside his door, listening to his wife deliver his son. He wanted to cry out in lament and beg God to forgive him for doubting, but when he opened his mouth, he couldn't make a single noise. God had made him mute.

A midwife rushed to the door. Her cheeks were flushed, but a joyful smile spread across her face. "It's a son!" she shouted. Looking at Zechariah, she added, "We'll call him Zechariah, I assume."

Zechariah shook his head no. He rushed to get a tablet, and scribbling quickly, he wrote, "His name is John!" The midwife read it and looked up at him, confused. Suddenly, Zachariah's entire mouth and throat tingled. He opened his mouth, and a great shout of joy sounded through the house. Overcome with emotion, he rushed in to see his wife and began to sing the praises of God.

Blot out my transgressions.



Prayer

Eternal Father, break my heart over my sins and teach me to accept Your mercy.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Saturday of Week 1

Psalm 119:145-152

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord.
I will keep your statutes.

I cry to you; save me,
that I may observe your decrees.

I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I put my hope in your words.

My eyes are awake before each watch of the
night,
that I may meditate on your promise.

In your steadfast love hear my voice;
O Lord, in your justice preserve my life.

Those who persecute me with evil purpose draw
near;
they are far from your law.

Yet you are near, O Lord,
and all your commandments are true.

Long ago I learned from your decrees
that you have established them forever.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what Mary might have felt as she prepared to return to Nazareth.

The sun had not yet peeked over the hills when Mary rose and pulled a scarf over her head. That night, the last one she would spend in her cousin's house before returning to Nazareth, had been long and sleepless. Mary knew returning to Nazareth would bring her face to face with many things she feared. Would her parents believe her... and what about Joseph?

Mary paused to run her hand over the swell of the Child within her. She believed what God had told her. This was God Himself, come to save her people. He would do what He had promised. He would not abandon her.

Yet you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true.



Prayer

Eternal Father, teach me to love Your law and know that You are always near.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Sunday of Week 2

Psalm 110

The Lord says to my lord,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The Lord sends out from Zion
your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your foes.

Your people will offer themselves willingly
on the day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.
From the womb of the morning,
like dew, your youth will come to you.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever according to the order
of Melchizedek.”

The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter heads
over the wide earth.

He will drink from the stream by the path;
therefore he will lift up his head.

Imagine...

**Let's imagine what it might have been like
the first time Mary felt Jesus kick.**

Mary's legs dangled out the back of a wagon as it bumped and rattled over the rough road to Nazareth. She placed her hand, yet again, upon her belly. Closing her eyes, she pictured the Child growing within her. She pictured His hands, His nose, His ears. He was alive, growing and changing every day.

The wagon lurched, sending her suddenly against the side, but in that instant she felt a gentle squirm inside her. Sitting up, she again closed her eyes. She pictured the leg and foot of her Child, this baby boy, God Himself. There, again, she felt a gentle squirm. The God of her ancestors was alive! He had heard their cries for help and He was coming to rescue them!

*The Lord has sworn and will not
change his mind.*



Prayer

Eternal Father, thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ, who loved us enough to become one of us.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Monday of Week 2

Psalm 42:1-3, 7-8, 11

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
'Where is your God?'

Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what Joseph might have felt when an angel appeared to him.

Joseph knelt beside his bed. Frustrated, he wiped tears from his eyes and slammed his fists down upon his bed. Earlier that evening, Mary had told him everything: the angel, the pregnancy, and the Child. He had listened without saying a word. Already he had made plans to quietly divorce her, and yet, as he recited his prayers before bed, his heart was gripped with worry. Was he called to do something different?

Wiping his face, Joseph crawled into bed. Immediately he drifted off to sleep, but there within a dream, Joseph was greeted by an angel of the Lord. "Joseph, son of David," the angel declared, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the Child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Joseph woke, covered in sweat and out of breath. He stared out into the darkness, wide-eyed, determined to faithfully respond to the call of the Living God.

My tears have been my food day and night.



Prayer

Eternal Father, teach me to embrace the plan You have for my life.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Tuesday of Week 2

Psalm 65:4-8, 12-13

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near
to live in your courts.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
your holy temple.

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.

By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.

Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by
your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the
evening shout for joy.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

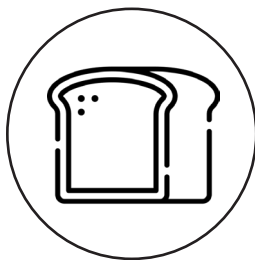
Imagine...

Let's imagine how Joseph's home changed when he welcomed Mary and Jesus.

Mary was setting out bread and meat when Joseph came in. He smiled at her and quickly began to wash his hands and face. Approaching the table, Joseph paused. This was their first meal together as husband and wife in his home. He knew Mary's presence would transform this space, but what he felt shook him.

Sitting down next to Mary, the words of the angel from his dream echoed in his mind. Joseph placed his hand tenderly upon the Child in Mary's womb. "Jesus," he whispered, "His name will be Jesus." Mary smiled and nodded. Joseph looked around at the rough walls of his home and marvelled that this humble place had become the holy temple of God.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.



Prayer

Eternal Father, draw me closer to You that I might live forever in Your holy temple!

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Wednesday of Week 2

Psalm 62:5-8

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my deliverance and my honour;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

Imagine...

Let's imagine Jesus as He grew and developed within the womb of Our Blessed Mother.

In the silence, in that dark hidden place, a baby grew. Day by day, hour by hour, His body developed and changed. His fingers twitched, His legs kicked, and His little heart beat. And with each beat of that tiny heart, the Will of God rang throughout the earth for those willing to hear it.

Outside that dark, hidden place the world was ignorant of the miracle of love that would soon break forth. The God of infinite glory, the very Word that called the world into being, had plunged from those heights to the very depths of human vulnerability. God had become a tiny fetus, utterly dependent on His mother, hidden from the world and helpless, out of love. The heart beat on. That same heart would one day offer us all the ultimate gift of love.

For God alone my soul waits in silence



Prayer

Eternal Father, draw me into the silence where You alone are my refuge and hope.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Thursday of Week 2

Psalm 71:1-6, 8

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the
wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's
womb.

My praise is continually of you.

My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all day long.

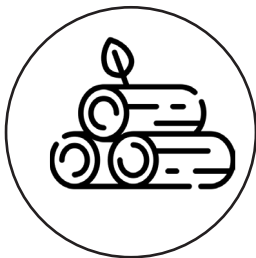
Imagine...

Let's imagine how Joseph might have felt as he prepared to be Jesus' father.

Standing at his workbench, Joseph's mind raced with questions. The angel had told him that the Child was from God, but what did that mean? What would this Child be like? How could he be a father to God? What would their lives together look like?

Joseph looked down at the rough wood that lay before him. He ran his hand over the twisting grains. He enjoyed building and working with wood. He was grateful God had called him to this work and blessed him with the skills and understanding he needed to do it. Grabbing a tool, he got back to work. The future was filled with unknowns, but God was calling him to stay here, in this moment, and do the work that lay before him.

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust.



Prayer

Eternal Father, You are my foundation, and no matter what troubles I face, I will never fear.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Friday of Week 2

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

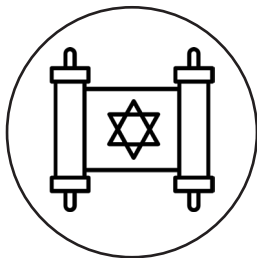
Imagine...

Let's imagine what it might have been like for Mary as the baby grew.

Joseph sat with the men in the synagogue. Each wore a prayer shawl, and many were busy discussing and debating the Law and the messages of the prophets. Over the low wall, he saw Mary, seated with the women. Around her were the familiar faces of other women from their family: aunts, cousins, and nieces. Beyond that were women Joseph did not know.

One woman near the opposite wall looked sideways at Mary and smirked. It was now impossible for Mary to hide the Child that grew within her. But Mary noticed nothing. Her mouth curled into a smile and her eyes were locked on the scroll and the man that read the Word of God.

My help comes from the Lord



Prayer

Eternal Father, be my help and my constant companion.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Saturday of Week 2

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your
hands;

you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Imagine...

Let's imagine how Mary and her mother might have prepared to welcome Jesus.

Anne gently placed her hands on either side of her daughter's womb. The Child kicked under His grandmother's touch, and Anne smiled, tilting her head to the side and blinking away tears. Pulling away, Anne wiped her face and reached for a small bundle tied up with a string that lay beside her. She handed it to Mary and nodded for her to open it.

Mary pulled the string and unfolded a beautifully woven set of clothes for an infant. She caressed the delicate stitches and shook her head at her mother, amazed at the gift. Finally, Mary leaned forward and grasped her mother's hands. "Mother," she said, "He will wear this when we bring Him to the temple and dedicate Him to God."

What are human beings that you are mindful of them?



Prayer

Eternal Father, I am Your beloved child, whom You watch over day and night.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Sunday of Week 3

Psalm 93

The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be
moved;

your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.

More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves of the sea,
majestic on high is the Lord!

Your decrees are very sure;
holiness befits your house,
O Lord, for evermore.

Imagine...

Let's imagine how Joseph might have felt when he realized that Michah's prophecy would be fulfilled.

Joseph looked at his wife, peacefully sleeping next to him. In the morning, they would set out for Bethlehem. Their belongings were neatly stacked by the door and the donkey had been given extra oats in preparation for the long journey. Mary lay on her side, one arm curled under her head and the other draped over her large belly.

Joseph rolled over and stared at the ceiling. Bethlehem. Since he was a child, he had known the prophecy of the prophet Michah, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, in the line of David. But they lived in Nazareth, 100 miles from Bethlehem. And then, the census had been ordered. When he realized he would have to make the trip now, before the Child was born, the truth of it all had washed over him again. This Child was the Messiah.

The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty



Prayer

Eternal Father, although Your ways are mysterious, Your plan is perfect. Increase my trust in You.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Monday of Week 3

Psalm 96:1-6

O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.

Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Imagine...

Let's imagine how it might have been when Joseph and Mary set out for Bethlehem.

Joseph pulled the gate shut and looked back at his home. Mary, seated on the donkey, smiled at him as he tightened his grip on his cane and took the first step down the path to Bethlehem.

Joseph had started down this same path many times before when he traveled to Jerusalem, which was just a few miles from Bethlehem. He'd traveled to Jerusalem three times each year to celebrate the feast days at the temple, but this trip was different. His wife was days away from delivering, and the path was crowded with others hurrying to be counted in the census. Worry weighed on him and made his whole body feel heavy. But He had pledged his faithfulness to God's plan, and he trusted in the Lord.

O sing to the Lord a new song!



Prayer

Eternal Father, You are mighty and awesome.
Teach me to know You are always near.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Tuesday of Week 3

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,

that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.

May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.

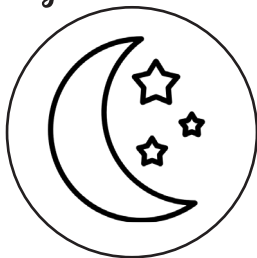
Imagine...

**Let's imagine how Mary might have recalled
God's faithfulness as she traveled.**

Joseph, exhausted from the day's travels, lay softly snoring next to Mary. The donkey too was asleep, and its head bobbed with each heavy breath. Just one day's journey from Nazareth, Mary lay on her back gazing up at the sky. So immense, it seemed to wrap around her, and everywhere it was dotted with the twinkling of far-off stars. Suddenly the story of another traveler filled her mind. Abraham. He too had been called from his home by God, and because of that faithfulness, God had made Abraham the father of a great nation, with as many descendants as there were stars in the sky.

So many years and generations lay between her and Abraham, but these stars were the same. These were the stars Abraham had seen when God made him that promise. And through all that time, God had been faithful and unchanging. His face forever shined on those who loved Him.

May God be gracious to us and bless us



Prayer

Eternal Father, thank You for the faithful people in my life and their beautiful stories of trust in You!

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Wednesday of Week 3

Psalm 98

O sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.
His right hand and his holy arm
have gained him victory.

The Lord has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the
nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.
Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy

at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Imagine...

**Let's imagine how Mary might have recalled
God's saving power as she traveled.**

The sound of children laughing and singing echoed around the valley. Reaching the river, they found five children, fully dressed, splashing and playing in the water. Mary slipped off the donkey and walked to the river's edge. She bent down and cupped the cool water in her hands. After a long drink, she splashed water on her face which was hot and dusty.

A young girl crept close to Mary, still singing. Seeing her, Mary smiled and reached out her hand. Here beside the river, Mary recalled how God had delivered His People. He had brought them through the water and out of slavery. He had made them His holy people. The young girl smiled and left to rejoin the others. Mary sat back and listened. The entire valley seemed to echo with the faithfulness of God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.



Prayer

Eternal Father, You have kept Your promises. Teach me to keep Your law!

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Thursday of Week 3

Psalm 132:11-18

The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:

‘One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, for evermore,
shall sit on your throne.’

For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:

‘This is my resting-place for ever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.

I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.

Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.

There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.

His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam.’

Imagine...

Let's imagine how Joseph might have contemplated God's promise to David.

As they traveled day after day, Joseph couldn't help but think of all the feet that had walked this path. In a few miles they would pass by Shiloh, the place where the prophet Samuel had been raised, the very same prophet that God would later use to anoint King David.

It seemed to Joseph that this path was the very thread that connected the past to the present. Samuel had walked here. King David and his army had likely used this path as well. Jewish men, faithful to the covenant they had made with God, passed this way many times each year. And now Joseph, a distant relative of King David, was also traveling this path with his wife who carried the Messiah. Despite the unfaithfulness of Israel, God had kept His promises. Soon a descendant of David would once again sit on the throne.

If your sons keep my covenant...their sons also, for evermore, shall sit on your throne.



Prayer

Eternal Father, write the law of Your covenant on my heart.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Friday of Week 3

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his
pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

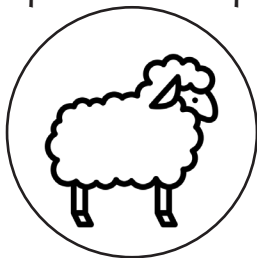
Imagine...

Let's imagine what it might have been like to sleep in open fields along the path to Bethlehem.

Joseph rolled onto his back and rubbed his face. A loud 'baaaa!' startled him and he quickly sat up. A young lamb with soft white wool was standing at the edge of their blanket. "Baaaa!" the lamb said again, springing away when Joseph reached for her.

Smiling, Joseph nudged Mary. Blinking her eyes, she focused on the lamb. She rubbed her sleepy eyes and laughed. "Well, good morning, little one!" she said. Suddenly a shepherd called from the hill above them. Rushing down the hill, the shepherd stopped in front of the lamb and, with a smile, shook his head disapprovingly at the small creature. Unafraid, the lamb stepped forward and allowed the shepherd to hoist her onto his shoulders. Nodding to Joseph and Mary, the shepherd and lamb climbed back up the hill.

We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.



Prayer

Eternal Father, care for me and lead me, as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Saturday of Week 3

Psalm 92:1-5

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;

to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,

to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your
work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

How great are your works, O Lord!
Your thoughts are very deep!

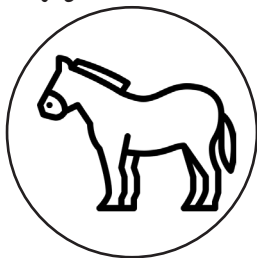
Imagine...

Let's imagine how it might have been as Mary and Joseph passed through strange towns.

Mary ran her fingers through the donkey's thick tufts of hair as she waited. The noon sun bore down and she pulled her shawl up to shade her face. She felt so small standing there in this strange village while Joseph went to purchase more food and find water. Strangers shuffled past and stared, but no one spoke to her.

Mary smiled down at the donkey. The way had been long and her body ached, but she was so grateful for this animal. Each day he had welcomed her onto his back as they continued down the path. Each night he slept near her, providing a comforting warmth through the night. Mary was so thankful for this donkey, one of God's simplest creatures. She loosened the halter and scratched behind the donkey's ears. The donkey happily stepped forward and tilted his head, inviting her to keep scratching.

At the works of your hands I sing for joy.



Prayer

Eternal Father, all of my blessings come from You!
Give me a spirit of thanksgiving!

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Sunday of Week 4

Psalm 112

Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.

Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures forever.

They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.
They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.

Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

They have distributed freely, they have given to the
poor;
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn is exalted in honour.

The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what it might have been like to meet Roman soldiers on the journey.

Joseph stepped close to the donkey and wrapped his arm around Mary. Coming toward them down the path was a group of Roman soldiers. Some walked and others rode on a wagon piled with logs and tools. As they traveled, the soldiers joked and passed a leather wine skin between them. Some paused to spit and curse. Their armor was dirty, splattered with blood and grease, and large swords swung at their hips.

Joseph lowered his head and held Mary close as they passed. But Mary, catching the eye of one young soldier seated on the wagon, looked directly at him. His arm was draped over a log and in his hand he held a rough hammer. Under her gaze, the young soldier froze and stared back. Mary and Joseph, and the Child too, were far from home. The world was full of danger, evil, pain and suffering. They couldn't see all the trials that awaited them, but they knew that this was God's plan and He asked them simply to remain faithful. The Child within her womb kicked as the Romans passed by and the little family continued down the path to Bethlehem.

For the righteous will never be moved



Prayer

Eternal Father, protect me from evil doers and keep my feet firmly planted upon Your Truth.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Monday of Week 4

Psalm 90:1-2, 4-6, 12

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the
world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;

in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

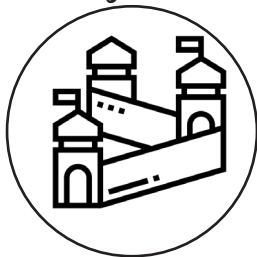
Imagine...

Let's imagine how Joseph might have felt as he passed the ancient city of Jericho.

As a boy, Joseph had learned the story of Jericho. He had imagined what it would have been like to be there, to be part of the Lord's army as they marched around the walls of the city and, at long last, blasted their horns. He imagined the ground shaking, the walls trembling, and suddenly crashing down.

Rounding a bend, there lay the ancient city of Jericho ahead of them. The history of this place overwhelmed Joseph when he spotted it. God Himself had brought the Israelites into this land, and He had delivered this land into their hands. Generations had passed, and the Israelites were still here, in this land. They were still God's Holy People.

*Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.*



Prayer

Eternal Father, You are my home and my dwelling place. Teach me to rest in You.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Tuesday of Week 4

Psalm 144:1-8

Blessed be the Lord, my rock,
who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for
battle;

my rock and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield, in whom I take refuge,
who subdues the peoples under me.

O Lord, what are human beings that you regard
them,
or mortals that you think of them?

They are like a breath;
their days are like a passing shadow.

Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down;
touch the mountains so that they smoke.

Make the lightning flash and scatter them;
send out your arrows and rout them.

Stretch out your hand from on high;
set me free and rescue me from the mighty
waters,
from the hand of aliens,

whose mouths speak lies,
and whose right hands are false.

Imagine...

Let's imagine what the final days of that journey to Bethlehem might have been like.

Huddled up against a rock ledge, Mary lay on her side, trying to stretch her tired and sore back. Joseph sat nearby, scanning the sky. A streak of lightning shot down. Soon heavy drops fell, splashing when they struck the ground. Mary struggled to sit up. Joseph pulled her close, and they crowded together under the thin overhang. Suddenly the heavens opened and a torrential rain swept down upon them.

Shivering, Mary pulled a blanket around her. Unable to keep her eyes open, her head fell onto Joseph's shoulder. As she slept, Joseph sat staring out at the rain. Suddenly he felt a nudge, and then another from within Mary's womb. Looking down he placed his hand squarely upon the Child. Again, the Child moved. Lightning flashed and the Child kicked again. The Child would be born any day, and as Joseph watched the rain and lightning, he marveled that the God who directed the sun and clouds was also here, the Child that would learn to call him 'Father'.

My rock and my fortress.



Prayer

Eternal Father, You are my strength and my refuge.
We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Wednesday of Week 4

Psalm 139:1-14

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

Imagine...

Let's imagine Mary's deep and personal relationship with God, even as she suffered.

Mary sat upon the donkey. Her eyes were closed, her head bowed, and her arms clutched the Child within her womb. Each time the donkey stepped, her head bobbed and she winced in pain. Joseph glanced at his wife. He did what he could to comfort her, but Mary had grown weak. Her legs shook when she stood, and that morning she hadn't been able to eat.

This woman and the Child she carried were still such a mystery to him. He loved her, he was united with her in the mission God had given them, but her relationship with God amazed him. She seemed always to be speaking to Him in her heart. Even here, suffering with each slow step forward, she seemed to be deep in conversation with God.

*Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.*



Prayer

Eternal Father, You made me and You know me.
Teach me to dwell with You always.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Thursday of Week 4

Psalm 43:1, 4-11

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;
answer me in your righteousness.

I remember the days of old,
I think about all your deeds,
I meditate on the works of your hands.

I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land

Answer me quickly, O Lord;
my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me,
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
for in you I put my trust.

Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

Save me, O Lord, from my enemies;
I have fled to you for refuge.

Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me
on a level path.

For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life.
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

Imagine...

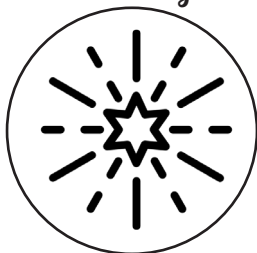
Let's imagine what Joseph might have felt when he saw the star.

Each mile that brought them closer to Jerusalem brought with it more travelers on the road. At night, they no longer camped in the silent wilderness. Several other fires dotted the night, and the conversations of other travelers floated through the air around them.

Mary sat close to Joseph. Unable to eat again, she felt as if all her strength had drained from her. She placed her head on his chest and tears flooded her eyes. Joseph placed his hand on her back. "Sleep, Mary," he whispered. "I will keep watch. The Lord will not abandon us."

Mary slept and Joseph looked down the road toward Jerusalem and beyond. Suddenly, there in the distance, high above the world, a light shone. "Is that a star?" he wondered. The star cast a great light that spilled onto the world. It ran down the path to the very place where he sat.

In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.



Prayer

Eternal Father, when sin and temptation surround me, teach me to look to You for my salvation.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Friday of Week 4

Psalm 147:12-20

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!

For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.

He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.

He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.

He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.

He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?

He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the Lord!

Imagine...

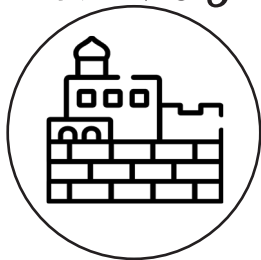
Let's imagine what Mary and Joseph might have experienced passing through Jerusalem.

Joseph and Mary had been to Jerusalem many times, and yet the crowded streets, filled with smells and noises and people from all over the world, never failed to amaze them. After all, they were simple people used to the quiet paths of Nazareth. But this was Jerusalem, David's City, the city of God.

In the center of the city, they passed the great temple. The temple was the heart of their faith. Each year they celebrated the feast days at the temple, and even when they were far from the temple, back in Nazareth, it felt as if their hearts remained here, in God's holy temple, always.

As they passed, Joseph looked up at the great stone walls of the temple which had been built and destroyed and rebuilt again through the centuries. Over the noise of the street, he heard the soft chanting of the Psalms from within.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!



Prayer

Eternal Father, when this life is over bring us into Your eternal city, the New Jerusalem of Heaven!

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Christmas Eve

Psalm 28

To you, O Lord, I call;
my rock, do not refuse to hear me,
for if you are silent to me,
I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.

Blessed be the Lord,
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.

The Lord is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.

The Lord is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

O save your people, and bless your heritage;
be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

Imagine...

Let's imagine Mary and Joseph searching for a place to stay.

Mary leaned low over the donkey and moaned. Labor pains shot up her back, and her midsection tightened. Joseph gripped the donkey's bridle and hurried them through the gates of Bethlehem. Already the sun was casting long shadows between the buildings. Mary whimpered and cringed, consumed by another contraction. "We are nearly there," Joseph said as he scanned the doorways for a place stay.

Joseph went to the first door, but there was no room for them. He went to another, and another, but it seemed that the entire nation of Israel was crowded into this tiny village, and there was no place for them to stay. Returning to Mary, Joseph saw panic in her eyes. The baby was coming, now.

In desperation, Joseph called out to God. Suddenly Joseph heard a small voice call to them. "I know of a place you can stay for the night," a man offered. "Let me show you."

*Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help.*



Prayer

Eternal Father, You hear the prayers of my heart and, in Your way and Your time, You answer me.

We wait for you, O Jesus. Come and dwell with us!

Christmas Day

Psalm 89:1-5, 15-17, 27-29

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all
generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established for
ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:

"I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations."

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

Happy are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance;

they exult in your name all day long,
and extol your righteousness.

For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favour our horn is exalted.

I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.

Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.

I will establish his line for ever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure.

Imagine...

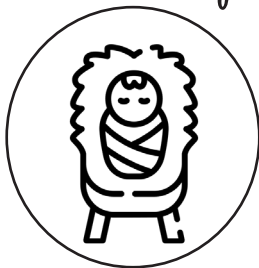
Let's imagine the first sound Jesus made the night He was born.

The small cry of an infant flooded the world with joy. Though He was born in a barn to unimportant parents, angels leapt to earth and in deafening voices, they sang the glory of God. Shepherds left their flocks to worship. Wise Men journeyed across the desert to visit the new King. Heaven and earth rejoiced.

And the mother, chosen by heaven, marveled at it all. Seated on a bed of straw, surrounded by oxen and sheep, she held her infant son. She stroked His soft cheek and kissed His round nose. God had kept His promise. Here was Emmanuel, God with us.

This tiny, helpless Child, born in the stillness of the night, would change everything.

I will make him the firstborn.



Prayer

Eternal Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son.

**We welcome Him into our home as our brother,
Savior, and friend.**

Catholic Sprouts

Our mission at Catholic Sprouts is to help every Catholic Parent embrace their role as the primary educator of their child's faith.

- We believe that the family is a holy institution created by God and that God will use the family to sanctify the world.
- We believe that our Catholic Faith is the most important gift we can give our children.
- We believe that the best place to learn the Faith is at home.
- We believe that every Catholic Parent can become the primary educator of their child's faith.
- We believe that the best way to teach the Faith is to learn together, to discuss and pray together. And it is our mission to create valuable tools for families that require zero prep, are authentically Catholic, and engage the hearts and minds of the entire family at once.

To find out more, we invite you to visit **catholicsprouts.com** or listen to our daily podcast, Catholic Sprouts, available wherever you listen.



Prayer to The Holy Family

O Jesus, only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, well-beloved Son of the Blessed Virgin and foster Child of St. Joseph, we most fervently implore Thee, through Mary Thine ever-blessed Mother and St. Joseph Thy foster father, take our children under Thy special charge and enclose them in the love of Thy Sacred Heart. They are the children of Thy Father in Heaven, created after His own image; they are Thy possession, for Thou hast purchased them with Thy Precious Blood; they are temples of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified them in Baptism and implanted in their hearts the virtues of faith, hope and charity.

O most loving Jesus, rule and guide them, that they may live according to the holy Catholic Faith, that they may not waver in their confidence in Thee and that they may ever remain faithful to Thy love.

O Mary, Blessed Mother of Jesus, grant to our children a place in thy pure maternal heart! Spread over them thy protecting mantle when danger threatens their innocence; keep them firm when they are about to stray from the path of virtue; and should they have the misfortune of falling into mortal sin, oh, then raise them up again, reconcile them with thy Divine Son and restore them to Sanctifying Grace.

And thou, O holy foster father St. Joseph, do not abandon our children! Protect them from the assaults of the wicked enemy and deliver them from all dangers of soul and body.

O dear parents of the holy Child Jesus! Intercede for us parents also, that we may bring up our children in the love and fear of God and one day attain with them the Beatific Vision.

Amen.

