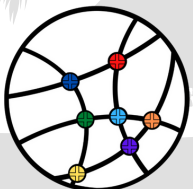
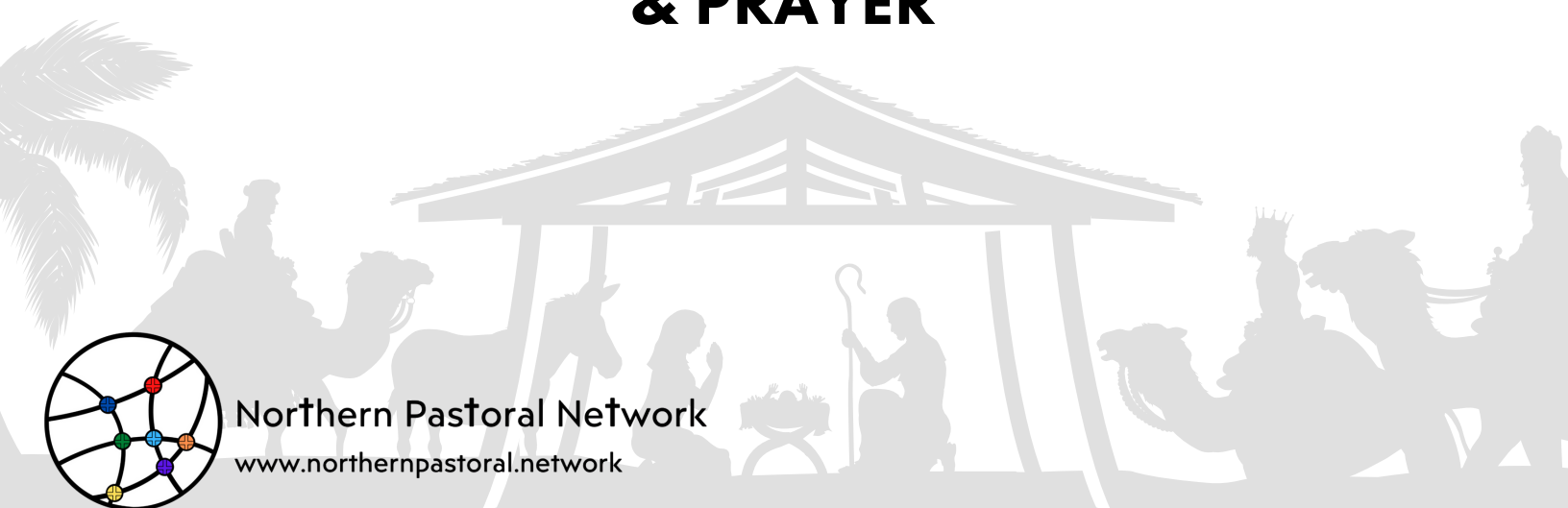




The
12 Days
of Christmas

**SCRIPTURE
REFLECTION
& PRAYER**



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Happy Christmas. Christmas is a time of homecoming for many of us and this year, more than any other year, our homes will be the focus of our Christmas celebrations. Home is where we first learn about our faith and God's extraordinary love for us. It is this 'domestic church' that we hope to nourish and inspire with this booklet for the twelve days of Christmas.

Our celebration of Christmas 2020 will be very different, but the story and the central meaning has not changed; we still celebrate the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God with us. This assures us that even in the difficulties and trauma of this pandemic, that God is with us.

It may not be possible for all of us to gather in our churches and the familiar carol services may be online. No matter what limitations are on public gatherings we can, in our families - the domestic church - experience the true spirit of Christmas, as we pray and reflect on the feasts of the 'twelve days' of Christmas. The great notes struck on the feast of Christmas echo throughout the twelve days that follow.

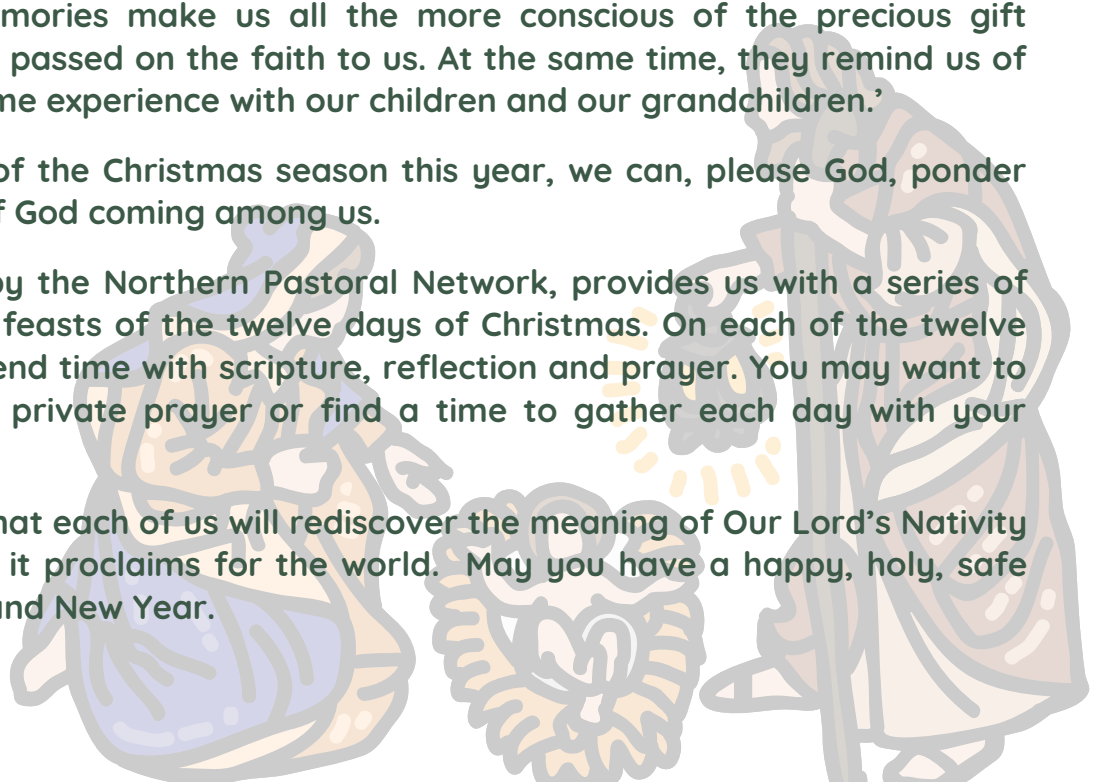
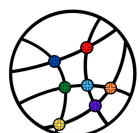
In our homes this year the crib can have a special focus. Last year Pope Francis published an Apostolic Letter on the meaning and importance of the nativity scene. The Latin title of the letter 'Admirabile Signum' refers to the "enchanted image" of the Christmas crèche (nativity), one that "never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder", writes the Pope. "The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God". Contemplating the Christmas story is like setting out on a spiritual journey, "drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman." So great is His love for us, writes the Pope, "that He became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him"

In concluding his letter Pope Francis made a special appeal: 'Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren.'

In a calmer celebration of the Christmas season this year, we can, please God, ponder the wonderful mystery of God coming among us.

This booklet, produced by the Northern Pastoral Network, provides us with a series of reflections following the feasts of the twelve days of Christmas. On each of the twelve days we invite you to spend time with scripture, reflection and prayer. You may want to use this booklet in your private prayer or find a time to gather each day with your family.

We pray this Christmas that each of us will rediscover the meaning of Our Lord's Nativity and the great hope that it proclaims for the world. May you have a happy, holy, safe and peaceful Christmas and New Year.



Friday 25th December
The Nativity of Our Lord

'for unto us a child is born,
Unto us a Son is given'

Isaiah 9:6

Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the LORD has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



Reflection

Stable of Bethlehem

Space of tenderness, home of hospitality;
To an anxious couple in search of shelter
To a new-born child fragile and vulnerable
To poor shepherds on the margins of town and society
To searching Magi, believing in the promise of the star.

As we rejoice in God-with-us
May we become Bethlehem spaces
Open to receive and embrace
the fragile, the vulnerable, the displaced;
in ourselves
in one another
in our world.

Christmas

Stillness of God, whisper of love
Breath of God, quiet mystery
Light of God, holy wisdom
Shadow of God, birth of mercy

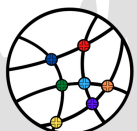
May God be with us in tenderness
and love this Christmas.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds
and the worship of the Wise Men.
Close the door of hate and open the door
of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every
gift and every greeting.
Deliver us from evil by the blessings that Christ brings.
May Christmas morning make us
jubilant to be your children
and Christmas evening find us
filled with grateful thoughts,
forgiven and forgiving,
bringing love,
peace and joy to all we meet.

Amen.



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Acts 7:55-60

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.



Reflection

The transition from the joy of Christmas to the cruelty of martyrdom seems too abrupt and it is a vivid reminder that Jesus came on earth to die. The Greek word from which we derive the English word 'martyr' literally means witness. In celebrating the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr, on this day, we are reminded that Jesus calls his followers to be witnesses; not all called to shed their blood. In contrast to the violence of the Roman Empire into which Jesus was born, we are called to be witnesses to a different kingdom, God's Kingdom, where values of compassion, justice, mercy and kindness reign. Love, including love of enemies, is at the heart of God's kingdom. As Stephen faced death, imitating Jesus, he prayed for his enemies. Stephen was a much loved and respected deacon in the early Church and it was his task to organise meals to feed the poor. In remembrance of Stephen's work, people used to collect money for the poor in small clay boxes during the year. On Saint Stephen's Day, 'Boxing Day', the boxes were broken and the money distributed to the poor.

Prayer

Lord God, we give you thanks for the example of Stephen who looked up to Heaven and prayed for his persecutors. We remember Christians who are persecuted throughout the world today, and all those afflicted because of their faithful witness.

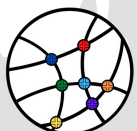
We face many dangers at the present time and we ask you to bless us with the gifts of courage and calmness which Stephen showed in the face of danger. Help us find the generosity of heart to pray for our enemies as Stephen did.

We remember those called to the ministry of the diaconate. Bless them in their work and inspire more people to respond to this calling.

We remember with thanksgiving those who work tirelessly for the poor. Bless and strengthen them in their work.

We humbly, ask you God to help us bring your gentle, joyful, love to our families, our neighbours, our parishes, and the world at this Christmas time.

Amen.



Sunday 27th December

Feast of the Holy Family



2

Luke 2:41-52

Every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was with the caravan, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' 'Why were you looking for me?' he replied. 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant. He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.



Reflection

On this Sunday following Christmas we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. Today, the Church encourages us to look to the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for inspiration and encouragement. Family is the place where we learn to love by first being loved ourselves. The family where love is found is a holy family. Holiness is being like God, and God is love. When we are loved, and when we love, we experience God in our lives. We know the Holy Family were not exempt from the hurts and challenges that face all families. They were a poor family who faced daily toil. They would have encountered misunderstanding and gossip from others. They would have encountered the death of loved ones; we know St. Joseph most likely passed away prior to Jesus' public ministry. In today's Scripture reading we see Mary and Joseph as worried parents in a crisis when their son is lost. When he is found they struggle to understand his reply when he is asked why he has done this. Mary devoutly ponders in her heart, and Joseph silently provides for them in strong faith when he fails to understand what Jesus says to him. For the next eighteen years, until he began his public ministry, Jesus lived under their authority. On this feast of the Holy Family, it is good to pray in thanks for our own parents and family. No one's family is perfect. All our family members, including ourselves have made mistakes and got things wrong. We have all done and said things that we have later regretted. Regardless of this, we owe our family everything and for this we thank God.



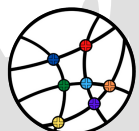
Prayer of Pope Francis to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love, to you we turn with trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or scandalised find ready comfort and healing.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.



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Monday 28th December

Feast of the Holy Innocents

3

Matthew 2:13-16

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

I called my son out of Egypt.

Herod was furious when he realised that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men.



Reflection

Prayer

The Feast of the Holy Innocents is celebrated soon after Christmas Day. The holy Innocents are innocent victims of King Herod's lust for power, cruelty, and desire to kill the Child Jesus. They are innocent victims of the same cruelty which nailed Jesus to a Cross. We think about the children today who are innocent victims including children whose families are forced to live in poverty or forced to flee their homes.

As people of Faith we are carriers of hope and joy. We believe the promise of 'Emmanuel' - God- with -us - in sorrows and in celebrations. The infant Jesus, born on that Holy Night when the Heavenly Choir of angels sang, is the Light of the World and conquers its darkness and sorrow.

We find well-springs of hope among all those who live lives of selflessness, generosity, kindness and compassion in their families and communities. They are God's Kingdom builders.

Today we have an opportunity to thank God for his extravagant love; the reason for our hope.

It is also a time to ask God to help us work to create the kind of world he intended; a compassionate, just, merciful and non-violent world.

Lord Jesus Christ, on this Feast of The Holy Innocents, we remember You embraced and placed Your hands upon the little children who came to You, and said: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Look now with fatherly eyes on the innocence of children and their parents' devotion.

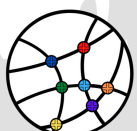
Bless them this day.

(Parents may sign the forehead of each child with the sign of the cross)

In Your grace and goodness let them grow in faith, longing for You, loving You and keeping Your commandments.

We ask you to help all of us make your Kingdom come in this world and make our homes, parishes and communities places of compassion and kindness, where no one is victimised.

Amen



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Tuesday 29th December

Saint John, Apostle & Evangelist

(Saint John's feast is celebrated on December 27th, but liturgically this year gives way to Feast of the Holy Family on the first Sunday after Christmas)

4

John 20:2-8

'On the first day of the week Mary of Magdala came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed.'

Reflection

Saint John, who was able to outrun Peter on their way to the empty tomb, is called, "the beloved disciple" in the Gospel. He was a Galilean, son of Zebedee and brother to Saint James the Greater, both of whom were fishermen. They were called by Jesus to be disciples as they were mending their nets by the Sea of Galilee. Fast forward and we see he was the only one of the apostles who did not forsake Jesus in the final hours of his Passion, and it was to him Jesus entrusted the care of his Holy Mother as He hung dying on the Cross. John was a believer, an apostle, and an Evangelist, the writer of the fourth Gospel, three Epistles and the Book of Revelation. He wrote down his experience, what he had heard and what he had seen as he followed Jesus. He wanted to share his Joy in knowing Jesus and enable other people to experience that Joy. St. Jerome relates that when St John, as a result of age and weakness, was no longer able to preach to the people, he would be carried to the assembly of the faithful by his disciples, with great difficulty; and every time said to his flock only these words: "My dear children, love one another."

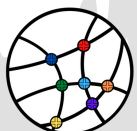
Prayer

Loving God,
today as we recall the life and work of
Saint John the Evangelist,
help us to see the urgency of our call to share the
Good News of God's love, in our families our
parishes and the world. May we like Saint John
learn how to run in search of you.

By prayer and reflection may we come to
understand the wisdom Saint John taught.

May our lives show that we take to heart the words
of Saint John 'My dear children, love one another'

Amen



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Luke 2:36-40

There was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Reflection

Anna was a prophetess who remained at the temple day and night, worshiping, fasting and praying. Most people would have disregarded Anna as an elderly woman who didn't have much to offer the world because she was a bit religious, always in church praying. It may be that for some of us that our gift to the Church and to the community is to be in the background praying. Our Churches and communities need to be held in prayer as they try to navigate the crises of today, including the pandemic. Anna was in the right place at the right time when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple. Inspired by the Holy spirit her wisdom enabled her to recognise this tiny baby was the Saviour of the world. Her spirituality spilled into thanksgiving to God and those prophetic words she spoke to Mary and Joseph. Anna and Simeon, who was present in the temple also, "saw salvation because they were expecting it. They were eyes that were waiting, full of hope".

(Pope Francis)

Prayer

Anna, the prophetess, was filled with the spirit of wisdom and hope by the Holy Spirit. We now pray to the Holy Spirit to come to our 21st century troubled world.

Come, Holy Spirit,
Come, Spirit of God,

Come with your peace, your power, your light.
Come with forgiveness, courage and hope.

Come now to our suffering world, sick with a virus
and everywhere threatened with silent death,
but most cruelly among your poorest children.

Come to our first responders, our doctors
and nurses and hospital staff,
the men and women who preserve the civic order
and protect us from fire and bring us our food.

Come now to the hearts and minds
of scientists seeking a vaccine for the pandemic,
to all who support their work, bringing to it
in equal measure patience and commitment.

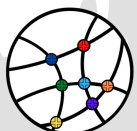
Comforter, we call you, Counselor,
Consoler, Advocate and Paraclete.

Come to the hearts and minds of
all who seek to walk with those who suffer.

With your gift, the community of believers
who came to be called Church, was born.
Strengthen us to be working signs for all
humanity to be one, a community of mutual care.

Amen.

(Leo J. O'Sullivan S.J. Abridged)



Thursday 31st December
New Year's Eve 2020

7th Day of the Christmas Octave
Feast of Pope Saint Sylvester I



6

John 1:1-8

The Word was made flesh, and lived among us
In the beginning was the Word:
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came to be,
not one thing had its being but through him.
All that came to be had life in him
and that life was the light of men,
a light that shines in the dark,
a light that darkness could not
overpower.



Reflection

As we bid farewell to 2020 there is much comfort in the words of today's Scripture which reassure us that Jesus is 'a light that darkness could not overpower'.

Many experienced darkness in the Covid 19 world of 2020. Many families among us are grieving for those who died this year and we share in their sadness. This was the year when the world as we knew it changed utterly and forced us to confront our mortality and vulnerability.

We have also witnessed charity and heroism flourishing in the midst of this crisis. Even in difficult times we can find things to be grateful for. Pope Francis has spoken of his gratitude for 'the spontaneous acts of altruism and heroic dedication' shown by so many. He tells us the crisis has shown us that, especially in times of need, we depend on our solidarity with others. "In a new way, it is inviting us to place our lives at the service of others. It should make us aware of global injustice and wake us up to the cry of the poor and of our gravely diseased planet."

He says the risk of contagion from a virus should teach us how the "contagion" of love passes from one heart to another. Pope Francis assures us "Just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Lord will also accompany us in future through His word and through the breaking of bread in the Eucharist. And He will say to us: "Do not be afraid! For I have overcome death."

We remember another Pope today as this is the feast of St. Sylvester. He was a fourth century Pope whose devout faith so moved his contemporaries, that they publicly honoured him as "confessor" one who, though not suffering martyrdom, lived a life completely given to Christ.



Prayer

God of the approaching New Year, we are walking into mystery.
Fill us with hope and an abiding trust that dwells in us amid all our joys and sorrows.
God of new beginnings and wonderful surprises, thank you for this gift of a new year.

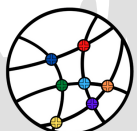
May it be a time of grace, a time to grow in faith and love,
a time to renew commitments to following Your Son, Jesus.

May it be a year of blessing, a time to cherish family and friends,
a time to renew efforts at work, a time to embrace faith more fully, a time to work for peace and justice.

Walk with us, please, in every day and every hour of this
new year, that the light of Christ might shine through us, in spite of our
weaknesses and failings.

Above all, may we remember this year that we are pilgrims on
the sacred path to You.

Amen.



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Friday 1st January
New Year's Day 2021

Solemnity
Mary Mother of God

7

Luke 2:16-18

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.



Reflection

Today is more than a celebration of a new calendar year. Today we celebrate the Feast of Mary Mother of God. It's an opportunity to honour Mary, the Mother of God, and our mother too, who said "yes" in the name of all of us. Her "yes" enabled God to take flesh in the Person of Jesus, who came as a humble baby who would grow and walk in our midst, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God.

With grace and courageous faith, Mary cooperated fully with what God asked of her; not just at the Annunciation, but each and every day of her life as she lived out God's plan for her. Difficult though it can be sometimes to believe or accept, God does have a plan for each us. Can we follow the example of Mary? Can we put our faith, hope and trust in God? Can we ponder and treasure in our hearts all that happens to us?

Mary is often given the title 'Queen of Peace' and today is also **World Day of Peace**. We know that sadly there are many people and countries suffering because of violence and random acts of terrorism. Some of these acts of violence take place in our own communities and in our own streets. Today we pray to Mary, Mother of God, and Queen of Peace, to help us play our part in breaking down barriers of hate and fear and bring whispers of hope.

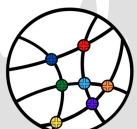


Prayer

We pray that in the year ahead we, like Mary, will cooperate with God in the ongoing mission of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Father of Jesus, You who sent your angels to herald your Son's coming with cries of peace.
Hear our cry now that your peace may touch all corners of our world.
You whose Son called all peacemakers blessed,
Help us forge peace in your name.
Peace among nations. Peace among neighbours. Peace among families.
When we look back on this time may we recall it as the time we all heard the angels' cry
And worked together to reveal that peace to all.
A peace worthy of God, born into the world.

Amen.



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Psalm 97(98):1-4

Mass of the Day - Responsorial Psalm

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Sing a new song to the Lord
for he has worked wonders.

His right hand and his holy arm
have brought salvation.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

The Lord has made known his salvation;
has shown his justice to the nations.

He has remembered his truth and love
for the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth,
ring out your joy.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.



Prayer

Christ Be With Me (Prayer of St. Patrick)

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me and before me.
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in hearts of all who know me.
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger,
Christ in quiet and in roar.

Love, blessed Trinity of three,
Bound in unity

Who guides my journey.

I will arise with strength of heaven

Trusting in Your light

To guide my journey

Shine before me

Lead me home.

Power to guide me, might to hold me,

Wisdom teach me, watching o'er me.

Ear to hear me, hand to guard me,

Love to conquer every fear.

Amen.

Reflection

On January 2, the Church honours Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, faithful defenders of the Church in difficult times, in the fourth century. They remained faithful disciples to the end of their lives. Our calling is to be faithful disciples today, patient with ourselves and those who share our journey in faith as we are 'discipled into a new way of living deeply and slowly'. The 'Song of the Seed' by Macrina Wiederkehr uses the beautiful analogy of unfolding petals to describe this process:

Life unfolds
a petal at a time
slowly.

The beauty of the process is crippled
when I try to hurry growth.
Life has its inner rhythm
which must be respected.
It cannot be rushed or hurried.

Like daylight stepping out of darkness,
like morning creeping out of night,
life unfolds slowly a petal at a time
like a flower opening to the sun,
slowly.

God's call unfolds
a Word at a time
slowly.

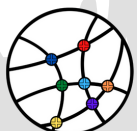
A disciple is not made in a hurry.
Slowly I become like the One
to whom I am listening.

Life unfolds
a petal at a time
like you and I
becoming followers of Jesus,
discipled into a new way of living
deeply and slowly.

Be patient with life's unfolding petals.
If you hurry the bud it withers.
If you hurry life it limps.

Each unfolding is a teaching
a movement of grace filled with silent pauses
breathtaking beauty
tears and heartaches.

Life unfolds
a petal at a time
deeply and slowly.



Sunday 3rd January

Second Sunday after
Christmas

9

John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus presented as the Word. In a beautiful poetic way, the writer Saint John brings us to the very beginning of time and reminds us that the Word was there from the beginning. The Word was made flesh and lived among us. This gospel passage also gives us the assurance that, if we come to know Jesus, we will become children of God.

As Saint John Paul II, wrote, 'the mystery of the birth of Jesus that took place over 2000 years ago must be lived today and every day. The Word that found a dwelling place in and through Mary comes to knock on our hearts this Christmas and every Christmas, today and every day.'

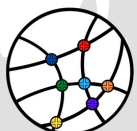
We are now his own people; the people Jesus lives among. This Christmas season we are invited again to open our hearts to him. To accept Him, means to respond generously to our call to love in ways that radiate God to the world. This is a call to building community so that everyone is cared for and valued. It means being people who are part of the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God.

Prayer

Christ Has No Body - Saint Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands
Yours are the feet
Yours are the eyes
You are His body
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Amen.



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Monday 4th January

10

John 1:35-42

As John stood with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, 'What do you want?' They answered, 'Rabbi,' - which means Teacher - 'where do you live?' 'Come and see' he replied; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him the rest of that day.



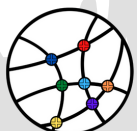
Reflection

In this Scripture passage John the Baptist turns the eyes of his two followers to our Lord. He says to them, "Look, there is the Lamb of God..." They see Jesus and leave John. John had the joy of knowing that he was fulfilling the purpose of his life by pointing others to Christ. In this John gives us a wonderful example. It is so easy to get self-absorbed in this life but we know true Christian love is selfless. True Christian living points others to Jesus. Jesus asks the disciples a simple question "What are you looking for?" And when they ask him in response 'Where do you live?', Jesus invites them to 'Come and see'. He extends an invitation to investigate, to take time and to come to their own conclusion. Today Jesus is inviting us to think again about what we are looking for in life. What are our priorities in our family, in our parish and community? Jesus invites us to 'Come and See' and to discover for ourselves the mission that he has for each of us.

Prayer

Saint John Henry Newman

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.



Tuesday 5th January

11

Psalm 99(100)

Mass of the Day - Responsorial Psalm

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing for joy.
Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Know that he, the Lord, is God.
He made us, we belong to him,
we are his people, the sheep of his flock.
Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Go within his gates, giving thanks.
Enter his courts with songs of praise.
Give thanks to him and bless his name.
Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Indeed, how good is the Lord,
eternal his merciful love.
He is faithful from age to age.
Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Prayer

Pope Francis

(Ecumenical Christian Prayer at the end of encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti')

O God, Trinity of love,
from the profound communion of your divine life,
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,
in his family of Nazareth,
and in the early Christian community.
Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
discovering Christ in each human being,
recognising him crucified
in the sufferings of the abandoned
and forgotten of our world,
and risen in each brother or sister
who makes a new start.
Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew
that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity
that God so loves.

Amen.

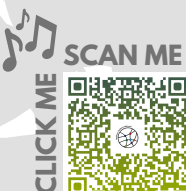
Reflection

In Pope Francis's encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* he invites us not to forget the lessons of history and what we are learning in this time of pandemic. "God willing, after all this, we will think no longer in terms of "them" and "those", but only "us". If only this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing. If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of respirators, partly as a result of the dismantling, year after year, of healthcare systems. If only this immense sorrow may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected." (*Fratelli Tutti*, 35) As we prepare for tomorrow's great Feast of the Epiphany when we take down the Christmas tree and put away the tinsel, we invite you to reflect on 'The Work of Christmas' composed by Howard Thurman an African American theologian.

The work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.



Wednesday 6th January

The Epiphany of
the Lord

12

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Magi

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote...' Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward, and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

Reflection

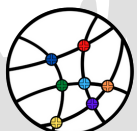
The journey of the wise men is an exciting story; it's a story of reading the signs of the times, of guidance on the way, of delight in finding faith and God, of the intrigue of a greedy and jealous king, and of the good beating the bad when the wise men outwit Herod. Pope Francis said, "in order to find Jesus, we also need to take a different route, to follow a different path, his path, the path of humble love. And we have to persevere." He recalled that the Gospel tells us that the Magi, after encountering Jesus, left by a "different road from that of Herod. An alternative route than that of the world, like the road taken by those who surround Jesus at Christmas: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds." For, he said, "only those who leave behind their worldly attachments and undertake a journey find the mystery of God." Each of us has our own personal star guiding us - the star of prayer, love, friendship, support...the star has a different name at different times. Be grateful for your star - and be grateful that you have been a star for others. In the book of God, each of us is a star.

Prayer

(Frank Colquhoun)

Lord Jesus may your light shine our way,
as once it guided the steps of the magi:
that we too may be led into your presence
and worship you,
the Child of Mary,
the Word of the Father,
the King of nations,
the Saviour of mankind;
to whom be glory for ever.

Amen.



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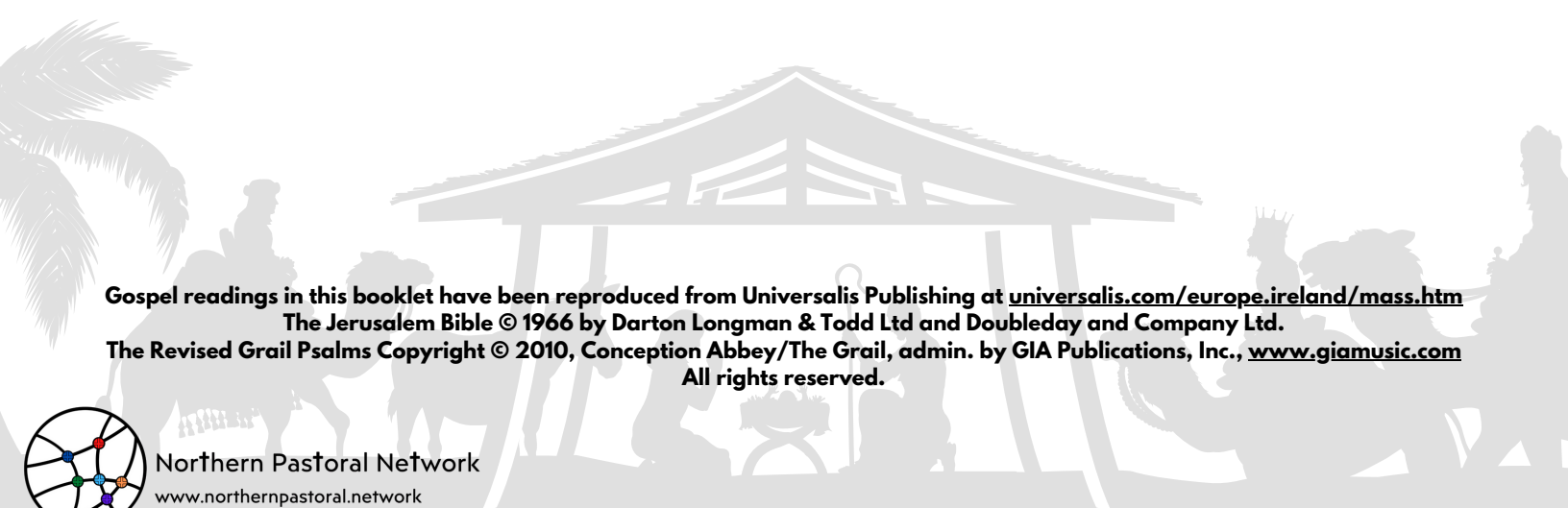




We conclude with the words of Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), that great Carmelite mystic and lover of the cross, who wrote so beautifully about the Christmas mysteries:

"Those kneeling around the crib are figures of light: the tender innocent children, the trustful shepherds, the humble kings, Stephen, the enthusiastic disciple, and John the apostle of love, all those who have followed the call of the Lord. They are opposed by the night of incomprehensible obstinacy and blindness: the scribes, who know indeed when and where the Saviour of the world is to be born, but who will not draw the conclusion: "Let us go to Bethlehem." King Herod, who would kill the Lord of Life. Ways part before the Child in the manger"

Today as we move away from the manger of our new-born King and Lord, let us recommit ourselves to the cause of life that is the Heart and the Joy of Christmas.



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