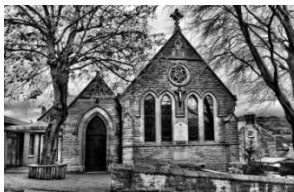


Sunday 18th December - Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Catholic Community of All Saints Catholic Church, Hassop, and Our Lady & St Joseph Catholic Church, Matlock

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Emmaus Hub
Bakewell, Hassop & Matlock



Lucinda Watson
Hub Administrator

email: info@hassopcatholic.org
email: info@matlockcatholic.org
telephone: 01629 582 804

Wednesday, Thursday & Friday
Available - 8:30am - 12:30pm



Fr Robbie O'Callaghan
Parish Priest

email: priest@hassopcatholic.org
email: priest@matlockcatholic.org
telephone: 01629 582 804
emergency mobile: 07449835765

Parish Deacon
Rev Richard Walsh

Newsletter



Myriams fotos - <https://www.pexels.com/photo/cold-snow-girl-winter-14607414/> - Free Stock Photo- Copyright Free

The liturgy for today, the Fourth and last Sunday of Advent, is characterized by the theme of closeness, God's closeness to humanity. The Gospel passage (cf. Mt 1:18-24) shows us two people, the two people who, more than anyone else, were involved in this mystery of love: the Virgin Mary and her husband, Joseph. A mystery of love, the mystery of God's closeness to humanity.

Mary is presented in the light of the prophet who says: "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*" (v. 23). Matthew the Evangelist recognizes that this happened in Mary, who conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 18). The Son of God "comes" into her womb in order to become man, and she welcomes him. Thus, in a unique way, God drew near to mankind, taking on flesh through a woman: God drew near to us and took on flesh through a woman. To us too, in a different way, God draws near with his grace in order to enter our life and offer us the gift of his Son. What do we do? Do we welcome him, let him draw near, or do we reject him, push him away? As Mary, freely offering herself to the Lord of history, allowed him to change the destiny of mankind, so too can we, by welcoming Jesus and seeking to follow him each day, cooperate in his salvific plan for us and for the world. Mary thus appears to us as a model to look to and upon whose support we can count in our search for God, in our closeness to God, in thus allowing God to draw close to us and in our commitment to build the culture of love.

God-with-us, God who draws near. This message of hope, which is fulfilled at Christmas, leads to fulfilment of the expectation of God in each one of us too, in all the Church, and in the many little ones whom the world scorns, but whom God also loves and to whom God draws near.

Pope Francis, Fourth Sunday in Advent (Yr A), 2016

Our Schools

St Joseph's Catholic

Academy

Chesterfield Road

Matlock

Derbyshire DE4 3FT

Headteacher:

Mrs S Carr

Tel: 01629 583616

enquiries@joe.srscmat.co.uk

St Mary's Catholic High School

Newbold Road

Upper Newbold

Chesterfield

Derbyshire S41 8AG

Headteacher:

Mrs M Dengate

Telephone: 01246 201191

enquiries@stmaryschesterfield.org.uk

Our Hospitals

Chesterfield Royal Hospital

NHS Foundation Trust

Calow

Chesterfield

Derbyshire S44 5BL

Tel: 01246 277271

www.chesterfieldroyal.nhs.uk



Advent Crib Collection -

During advent there will be a collection point for Baby Basics in the Lady Chapel. Every item given away through Baby Basics is donated by someone in our local community. **Needed most are:** toiletries - for both mum and baby, maternity pads, breast pads, Moses basket sheets, baby towels, nappies and wipes. They currently have plenty of clothes, so these are not needed. If you would like to donate any of these things just place them in the collection box and we will deliver them to Baby Basics in Chesterfield at the end of Advent.

(Unfortunately, they cannot accept donations of car seats, cot mattresses, breast pumps, stair gates and or electrical items)

Mass Intentions

Year A - Cycle I - Eucharistic Prayer: III - Psalter: IV

Saturday 17th December - Weekday of Advent

10.30am to 11.30am - Matlock - Advent Confessions

4.30pm - Matlock - Rosary - Joyful Mysteries

5.00pm - Matlock Vigil - Diana Burgess RIP 1st Anniversary

(Caldicott & Godfrey Families)

Sunday 18th December - Fourth Sunday of Advent

9.00am - Hassop - Mass - Nigel Etchells RIP (Cynthia Ryder)

11.00am - Matlock - Mass - Farrell Family RIP (Peggy Flynn)

Ambrose & Margaret Holland RIP (Ann & Helen Holland)

5:00pm - Matlock - Christmas Carol Service

Monday 19th December - Weekday of Advent

No Mass/No Service (Fr Robbie's Time Off)

Tuesday 20th December - Weekday of Advent

10.30am to 11.30am - Hassop - Advent Confessions

7:00pm - Hassop - Christmas Carol Service

Wednesday 21st December - Weekday of Advent

9.30am - Matlock - Rosary - Glorious Mysteries

10.00am - Matlock - Mass - Kathleen Stephenson RIP (David S)

12.00pm - Hassop - Mass - Patrick Malia RIP Ann. (John & Nikki)

Thursday 22nd December - Weekday of Advent

9.30am - Rosary - Mysteries of Light

10.00am - Matlock Mass - Margaret Jones RIP (John McLarkey)

10.30am to 11.30am - Matlock - Advent Confessions

Friday 23rd December - Weekday of Advent

5.30pm - Matlock - Rosary - Sorrowful Mysteries

6.00pm - Matlock - Mass - Stephen McConnell RIP (Phyl Edees)

Saturday 24th December - Christmas Eve



3:45pm - Hassop - Gathering Christmas Music

4:00pm - Hassop - Christmas Eve Family Mass - People of God



5:45pm - Hassop - Gathering Christmas Music

6:00pm - Matlock - Christmas Eve Family Mass

(Ennis) **Denis McGrath RIP** (John McLarkey & Family)



Sunday 25th December - Christmas Day



9.00am - Hassop - Mass - The People of God



11.00am - Matlock - Mass - Ambrose & Margaret Holland RIP



Hassop & Bakewell - News for the Pews

Sick and Housebound - We remember in our thoughts and prayers: Marie Hopkinson, Pat Erskine-Murray, Maria Hutchinson, Peter Peel, Annalise & Shirley Plant and Mary Howlings and all our sick and housebound parishioners and friends.

Welcome to our Visitors & Parishioners this weekend

The Church has been singing the **"O" Antiphons** since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the Magnificat canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23. The messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfilment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well.

December 17th - O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!

December 18th - O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19th - O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!

December 20th - O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21st - O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22nd - O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

December 23rd - O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord.

The Emmaus Hub - is now closed for Christmas and will **reopen on Wednesday 11th January**. Please leave a message on the answer machine or email for Fr Robbie to pick up daily. For emergencies only telephone Fr Robbie on **07449 835765**

Christmas Mass Seating - There is now no need to book for Christmas Mass **places will be available at first come first seated**. Distancing has been removed, but gel is still mandatory, and masks will be freely available to all who wish them. **Fr Robbie**

Hassop Christmas Flowers - Thank you so much for helping making our parish look beautiful for the coming of Our Saviour. **£120.50** was collected. Thank you for your generosity. Flower Team x

All Saints Church Christmas Carol Service

Tuesday 20th December at 7.00pm
followed by Mince Pies, Mulled Wine,
Tea & Coffee & Christmas Cheer
for the Saviour is to be born in Bethlehem

December - Groups and Regular Events - All welcome - Anytime!

Choir Practice	Tuesdays at 3:30pm	
Matlock Friday Bible Study Group	*** Next Meeting 13 th January 2023 ***	
Holy Hour & Benediction	*** Next Adoration 12 th January 2023 ***	
Rotas	Hassop 18 Dec	Hassop 25 Dec
Sunday Wardens - Close	Volunteers	Volunteers
Welcome - Sunday	Linda B	Cathy & Tim
Readers - Sunday 9am	Mickey E	Ken H
Sunday Morning Coffee	Volunteers	No Coffee Today
Wednesday - Reader	Mare H	Patrick C
Flowers	No Flowers	Christmas Team

Hassop/Bakewell - Thank You so much for supporting Your Parish

Loose: £74.40 Env: £115.00 S/O: £452.07 Total: £641.47



Safeguarding Representative Anthony Howlings

Anthony.HowlingsPSR@dioceseofnottingham.uk

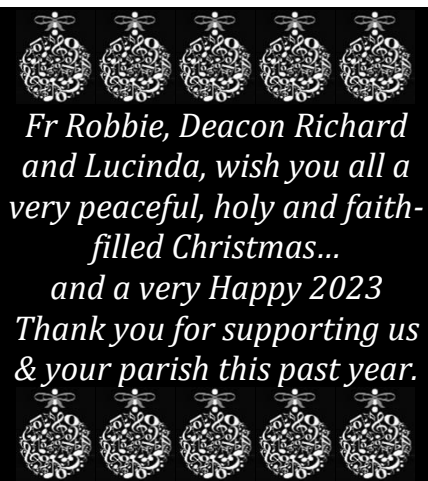
'As a Christian Family, we will **meet** and **celebrate** the Holy Eucharist on the first day of the week. We will **care** for and **support** each other.

We will strive to be good examples of our Christian faith and show our **commitment** to that **faith** in our daily lives. In **love** we will **support** and **participate** with other Christian Churches in and around Bakewell.'

Make a donation to Hassop



Subscribe to the Joint Newsletter





Matlock - News for the Pews

Welcome to our Visitors & Parishioners this weekend

Sick and Housebound - We prayer for - Bob Hilton, Gordon Smythe, Lily Chapman, Imelda Hanlon, Ann Holland, Anna Thompson, Peggy Flynn, Kath Dyson, Linda Houghton and all our sick parishioners.

Safeguarding Representative
Paula Scully
0115 9539850

Our parish community is called to build the Kingdom of God. We gather for **WORSHIP** to strengthen our Christian unity; also included are our various ministries where you can **SERVE** those most in need with love and dignity, and opportunities to **GROW** your faith in the truth of life that Jesus provides us. We appreciate and are open to your willingness to **GIVE** of your time; treasure and talent. We want you to know, furthermore, that it is here that you have a place to **BELONG**: there is always a pew for you! This beautiful building belongs to you. Cherish your time here, as God the Father cherishes you.

Make a donation to Matlock



Subscribe to the Joint Newsletter



Parish Christmas Hamper Raffle

£1.00 per ticket

£5.00 per strip

All funds raised go to the maintenance of the parish
Good Luck

Prize Draw during the Christmas Carol Service

Our Warm Space Mondays - 9am until 5pm

If you want to be involved, please contact:

colette.hanson@btinternet.com - to help in the hall on a Mondays
paulinaswanwick1947@gmail.com - to make or bake refreshments
shirley.a.johnson@btinternet.com - to donate books, games, jigsaws
jlangle@uwclub.net - to donate items from the 'shopping list'
dauidswanwick@btinternet.com to offer transport

Warm Space is not open on Monday 26th December or 2nd January

St Joseph Church Christmas Carol Service

Sunday 18th December at 5.00pm

followed by Mince Pies, Mulled Wine,

Tea & Coffee & Christmas Cheer

for the Saviour is to be born in Bethlehem

The Emmaus Hub - is now closed for Christmas and will reopen on Wednesday 11th January. Please leave a message on the answer machine or email for Fr Robbie to pick up daily. For emergencies only telephone Fr Robbie on **07449 835765**

Christmas Mass Seating - There is now no need to book for Christmas Mass **places will be available at first come first seated.** Distancing has been removed, but gel is still mandatory, and masks will be freely available to all who wish them. For those who wish to distance still I advise using the Lady Chapel or Hall. **Fr Robbie**

Matlock Christmas Flowers - Thank you so much for helping making our parish look beautiful for the coming of Our Saviour. **£216.60** was collected. Thank you for your generosity. Flower Team x

December - Groups and Regular Events - All welcome - Anytime!

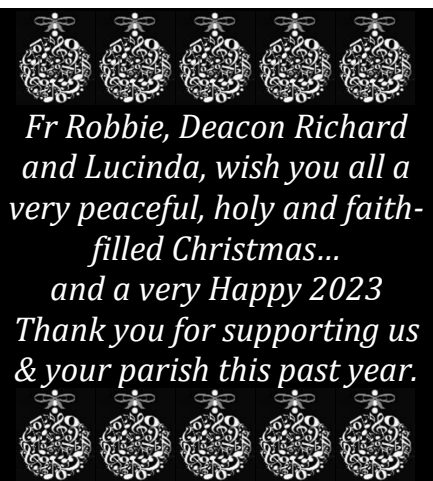
Matlock Friday Bible Study Group *** Next Meeting 13th January 2023 ***

Holy Hour & Benediction ***Next Adoration 12th January 2023 ***

Rotas	Matlock 17/18 Dec	Matlock 24/25 Dec
Welcome - Saturday	Denise & John C	Paula & David S + Vols
Readers - Saturday 5pm	Mel B & Richard A	Lesley B & John C
Simple Saturday Supper	Jill & Tim	**Next Session 7/1/23
Welcome - Sunday	Phyl E & Volunteers	Phyl E & Volunteers
Readers - Sunday 11am	Chris J & Fred K	Karen Mc & Ingrid P
Church Cleaners	Sheila	---

Matlock - Thank You so much for supporting Your Parish

Loose: £110.79 Env: £362.00 S/O: £738.81 Total: £1,211.60





Advent – Week Four (December 17–24)

The Witness of Mary and Joseph

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year C)

“Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Luke 1:45

As we enter into the fourth week of Advent, we are given our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph to reflect upon. Though our Blessed Mother was perfect, and St. Joseph was a deeply virtuous man, they were both still fully human and would have walked through Mary’s pregnancy and Jesus’ birth with every human emotion and experience.

St. Joseph was faced with an extraordinary mystery as he discovered his wife was pregnant. He knew her to be a woman of exceptional virtue and holiness and had to reconcile that with her surprising pregnancy. Even after the angel appeared to him in a dream he would have had questions arise in his mind as he faced this situation.

Our Blessed Mother was also invited by God to face her pregnancy in faith. Her response was perfect, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” She could not explain nor understand what was happening but, nonetheless, she knew deep in her soul that God was in charge leading all to His glory.

Both Mary and Joseph are wonderful models of faith and obedience. They were obedient to the will of God despite the fact that the will of God drew them into an incredible and unfathomable mystery. They were first-hand witnesses to the salvation of the world and to the greatest act ever known. And they both embraced this mystery and accepted it in faith.

Reflect, today, upon your own invitations from God to embrace the mysteries of life. God’s ways are often more than we can comprehend and figure out. Mary and Joseph give us the witness of how we are to handle every mystery God invites us to participate in. Say “Yes” to the will of God just as this holy couple did.

Dearest Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, pray for me that I may have the faith you both lived. When questions arise in my heart, help me to respond generously to God as you did. May I trust in all that God has spoken in imitation of each one of you. Jesus, I trust in You.

The Perfect Plan of God

December 17, Advent Weekday

Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Matthew 1:15b–16

We begin, today, an “octave” of immediate preparation for the birth of Christ. After this octave, we enter into the glorious Solemnity of Christmas!

On this day, we are presented with the long genealogy of Jesus’ ancestors. Verses 2–16 of Chapter One of Matthew’s Gospel present us with three series of fourteen ancestors. Abraham begins the genealogy and Jesus concludes it. Though there are many interesting facts that a Scripture scholar could take from this genealogy and all who are named in it, the heart and soul of its meaning is found in Verse One: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham.” This shows the direct link from the promise God made to Abraham, to its fulfillment in the person of the Son of God.

One thing we see in the fulfillment of this promise, is the fact that God is faithful. True, it took centuries for His promise to Abraham to be fulfilled, but it happened nonetheless and there is little doubt that Abraham rejoiced, greatly, as he witnessed the glorious birth of one of his descendants as the Savior of the World.

This also tells us that God’s timing and His ways are often different than what we may at first conceive. We can come up with many “good” ideas and hope they will come to pass. But, all too often, when they do not turn out immediately as we had hoped for, we can get discouraged.

Learn the lesson, today, of God’s perfect “long-term” plan. He knows what He is doing and He is bringing about His plan for us all. He is slowly and intentionally guiding us along the path that leads to salvation and peace. It may not be the way we would do things, but it is the perfect way.

Reflect, today, upon the plan God has for your life. Does He call you to patience and longsuffering? Does He require a trust that is demanding and absolute? Does He require a surrender of your own ideas and your own ambitions? Yes, He requires all of this and more. Recommit yourself to the perfect plan in the heart of our Father in Heaven and He will guide you each step of the way.

Lord, I know Your ways are perfect and that Your plans are so often not my own. Help me to let go of my own ideas and desires and to surrender more deeply, in trust, to all that You have prepared for me. Lord, Your wisdom is perfect. Help me to believe that with all my heart. Jesus, I trust in You.

The Faith of Saint Joseph

December 18, Advent Weekday

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:20b–21

Saint Joseph is a man that we know little about, but think about the importance of his role in salvation history. He was entrusted with the Son of God as his little child. At first, he was confused about how Mary could have gotten pregnant, but upon receiving the words of the angel in a dream, he accepted this Child as his own and cared for Him with a father’s love.

It’s significant to note that Saint Joseph embraced the Christ Child because of a dream. But was it only a dream? We all have many dreams and some of them are strange and nonsensical. So why did Saint Joseph rely upon the authenticity of this dream?

The answer to this question is quite simple. Even though the dream he had was just that – a dream, it was also accompanied by the gift of faith. Joseph knew, with a certainty beyond human reason, that the voice of God had spoken to him and he responded with generous faith.

We may not have dreams through which God speaks to us in the form of an angel, but God does speak to us all day long. He speaks directly to our minds and hearts, and also through the care and mediation of countless hosts of angels in various ways. The angels of God are constantly bringing us divine messages and inspirations. The question is whether or not we are listening.

Listening to the voice of God, through the mediation of the angels, is not about us seeing or hearing the angels speak, literally. Rather, it's a matter of discerning this language of love spoken to us and calling us to faith.

Listen in the silence of your heart, this day, and allow yourself to follow the glorious witness of Saint Joseph as he responded to our Lord's will with perfect faith and trust.

Lord, I long to hear Your sweet voice. I long to know all that You command of me and all that You inspire me to embrace in life. Give me the grace I need, to follow every inspiration in life so that I may fulfill Your perfect and holy will. Jesus, I trust in You.

Zechariah and His Doubts

December 19, Advent Weekday

"I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time." Luke 1:19b–20

In describing the impact of this statement, here are a few descriptive words: Powerful, authoritative, definitive, shocking, humbling, overwhelming and divine. "I am Gabriel, who stand before God!" How many people can say that? Gabriel, being a celestial being is one of the few.

It's interesting to contrast the conversation of Zechariah and Gabriel with the one that Mary has with Gabriel. Their responses to Gabriel seem similar, but Gabriel reacts to each of them in completely different ways. To Mary, Gabriel offers a simple explanation upon her request for more information: "How can this be?" she says. Gabriel responds, "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you..." But, in the case of Zechariah, the Angel does not give an explanation. Instead, Zechariah is struck mute for his failure to believe.

Though these reactions of Mary and Zechariah may seem similar on the surface, it's clear that their hearts are quite far apart. For Mary, our Blessed Mother, her question was asked in perfect faith. She heard Gabriel speak and she believed. But faith seeks understanding and so Mary, in her perfect faith, sought to understand the mystery that was being presented to her. Gabriel responds with a brief insight and Mary is grateful for that.

Zechariah responds to the angel, "How shall I know this?" In other words, he admitted to not "knowing" these words to be true. Faith is knowledge of the clearest form and Zechariah failed to have faith. Therefore, he was struck mute as a sign that, without faith, there is nothing to speak.

Reflect, today, upon your own faith. Is it pure and eager to assent to all that God reveals? Are you ready and willing to believe all that God speaks to you? Though you may not receive His word through the direct mediation of an angel in visible form, you are privileged to have God speak to you constantly through these angelic advocates. When they speak, do you listen and respond with the faith of our Blessed Mother's? Or, like Zechariah, do you hesitate and doubt the revelation?

Lord, give me the same pure and holy faith that Your Blessed Mother had. Though I acknowledge my sin and weakness, help me, by her example and intercession, to receive each and every word You wish to speak to me through the mediation of the hosts of Heaven. May I always be attentive to Your word and respond with a generous heart. Jesus, I trust in You.

Our Blessed Mother and Her Perfect Faith

December 20, Advent Weekday

But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. Luke 1:34–38

As we were given the example of Zechariah yesterday, so today we are given the witness of our Blessed Mother. And her witness is one of perfect faith!

What is her response? “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” We traditionally speak of this as her great “*fiat*” (yes) to God!

One thing we see within these words is that our Blessed Mother is offering her complete consent to something that she does not understand. The archangel gives a brief explanation to her but, if you honestly analyze this situation, what the angel says is beyond belief for most people. It’s also fair to conclude that the archangel’s explanation was not what convinced our Blessed Mother. She didn’t listen to these words, analyze them, consider how likely they were or were not, and then decide if she would believe. No, she listened, pondered, and then immediately consented to the words spoken. “Let it be done to me according to your word” she said. She didn’t say, “Let it be done to me insofar as I understand what you mean.” Our Blessed Mother’s faith was one that knew the truth without having to fully understand it. This is a gift!

Reflect, today, upon your own knowledge of the truth. Are you able to consent to the will of God and the truths of God without fully understanding them? Do you trust God more than you trust your own human reason? Are you willing to move forward in life by faith rather than by your limited human reason alone? Strive to imitate the pure faith-knowledge of our Blessed Mother. She knew the truth because it was spoken in her heart. And as she listened, she consented and embraced the holy will of God. We must do the same.

Lord, I desire to trust You with my whole mind, heart, soul and strength. Help me to always hear You speak and to respond with complete faith and generosity. Lord, may I imitate the perfect faith of Your mother by praying always with her, ‘let it be done to me according to Your word.’ Mother Mary, pray for us. Jesus, I trust in You.

An Infant Rejoices in the Presence of the Lord!

December 21, Advent Weekday

“Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Luke 1:42b–45

There is a lot to take in from this beautiful passage spoken by Elizabeth to our Blessed Mother. First of all, we see the general tone of her greeting. It’s one of great affection. It’s easy to perceive the authentic joy in Elizabeth’s heart as she encounters the Mother of God and her Lord dwelling within Mother Mary’s womb.

“And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” This line reveals that Elizabeth took true joy in her encounter with Mary and saw this encounter as an abundant blessing. This is interesting since Elizabeth was so much older than Mary. She could have “expected” Mary to be there and taken her visit for granted. But she didn’t, she saw it with much gratitude.

It’s also clear that Elizabeth is not the only one who is blessed to encounter the Mother of God and her Child. Elizabeth’s baby, John the Baptist, who is living within her womb, is also filled with joy and leaps as an expression of that joy. What an amazing effect this visit has upon both Elizabeth and her unborn child.

This should raise a question in your own heart. Do you perceive the presence of Christ when He comes to you? If Elizabeth and her unborn child could perceive Him, shouldn't we also be able to perceive Him? When you enter a church, for example, are you immediately aware of the divine presence of our Lord? Do you sense His closeness? And when you receive Him in Holy Communion, is your heart intently fixed upon the Savior coming to you and residing within you? This takes faith and it takes eyes that are fixed on the coming and presence of the Lord.

Pray, today, for the gift to see. Pray that our Lord will give you the eyes you need to perceive His divine presence all around you. And pray, especially, that your mind and heart will be open to His divine presence as you encounter and receive Him in Holy Communion.

Lord, I do desire to see You and to know You. I desire to discern Your presence all around me and in every way that You come to me. Help me, especially, to be attentive to Your presence in Holy Communion. May my heart always leap for joy at Your coming to me in this most perfect way. Jesus, I trust in You.

The Great Joy of Our Blessed Mother

December 22, Advent Weekday

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name." Luke 1:46–49

This song reveals the joy in the heart of the Mother of God. She humbly acknowledges the great things God has done for her and expresses her deepest joy.

It's interesting to note that both her "soul" and her "spirit" are mentioned in this song of praise. Her soul "proclaims" and her spirit "rejoices." What does this reveal?

In part, it reveals both an action of her own and an action of God. Our Blessed Mother's "soul" refers to all of her human abilities within her mind, will, emotions and desires. It's what makes her human. And with those human capacities she proclaims God's greatness. In other words, with her mind she perceives God's greatness, with her will she acknowledges and chooses to proclaim His greatness, and she does so with all of her feelings, emotions and desires. Her whole being was consumed with the greatness of God!

It also reveals that within her "spirit," she was filled with the glorious gift of joy. As she proclaimed the greatness of God, the Holy Spirit flooded her and produced this spiritual fruit. Joy comes from God actively working within our lives. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit and our Blessed Mother had this gift in its fullness.

Reflect, today, upon your own soul and spirit. Do you imitate the perfect example of our Blessed Mother as she seeks to know, love and proclaim the greatness of God with her whole being? And do you allow the Holy Spirit to flood your spirit with joy? Ask our Blessed Mother to pray for you as we approach Christmas. Ask for the grace to "proclaim" and "rejoice" with her at the coming celebration of the birth of her Divine Son so that you, too, may sing her song of praise!

Dearest Mother, you offer us the perfect example of how to live as a faithful and humble servant of the Most High God. You proclaimed His greatness with your whole being and were filled with joy at His coming. Help me, by your powerful intercession, to imitate your faith and to love God with my whole being. Mother Mary, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.

Zechariah Returns to Faith

December 23, Advent Weekday

So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Luke 1:62–64

Our beautiful story continues as we grow closer to our Christmas Day celebration of the Birth of Christ. Today we once again reflect upon the person of Zechariah, the father of Saint John the Baptist. We recall how God blessed him and Elizabeth with this miraculous pregnancy at an old age after being barren. The Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple to reveal this glorious event, but Zechariah received it with disbelief. The result was that he was struck mute until this, the day of his birth.

Today's Gospel reveals how Zechariah untied the knot of his disbelief. He did so by following the command of the angel to name the child "John." Traditionally, their first born would be named Zechariah after his father. But God had picked the name "John" and, therefore, both Zechariah and Elizabeth are given the opportunity to embrace and manifest their faith by accepting the name given to their child by God.

In a sense, we can say that Zechariah "righted his wrong." He righted it by making the choice of faith and acting on it. This is a great witness for all of us because all of us have failed in faith in one way or another. In the case of Zechariah, God punished him severely, stripping away his ability to speak. But what we see today is that this "stripping" of Zechariah's speech was not done primarily as a punishment, but so that God could manifest His glory through Zechariah's manifestation of his faith. People are "amazed" at Zechariah as he fulfills this act of faith and names his newborn child "John." Thus his suffering is now a manifestation of the glory of God!

In all of our lives, we can regularly point to failures of faith. Sometimes, God sees fit to impose a severe "punishment" upon us as a result. We may endure some suffering or hardship for our failure to heed His voice wholeheartedly. But know that any "punishment" from God is not primarily a result of his wrath. Rather, most often the consequences of any lack of faith is permitted by God because He has something greater in mind. In this case, it was so that He could loose the tongue of Zechariah at the proper moment so that he could glorify God with great faith. In our lives, we should look for Him to do the same.

Reflect, today, upon any hardship you have endured as a result of your own weakness, sin or lack of faith. Do not see any hardship as a punishment in the normal sense of that word. Rather, see it as an opportunity through which God is calling you to give Him even greater glory.

Lord, I know I lack faith in my life. I fail to believe all that You speak to me. As a result, I often fail to put Your words into action. Dear Lord, when I suffer as a result of my weakness, help me to know that this and all suffering can result in giving glory to You if I renew my faith. Help me, like Zechariah, to return to You always, and use me as an instrument of Your manifest glory. Jesus, I trust in You.

Zechariah Proclaims His Faith

December 24, Advent Weekday

“You, my child, shall be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:76–79

This song of praise from Zechariah is spoken once his tongue is loosed after manifesting faith in the birth of his son John. And in this particular song of praise, Zechariah gives glory to God as he manifests not only his faith, but also the fruit of his faith: deep, clear, articulate and insightful knowledge of the workings of the Father in Heaven.

Zechariah speaks truths that could only be known by him through the gift of faith. There is little doubt that his long exile of silence, after being struck mute by the Angel Gabriel, resulted in him seeking, hearing and understanding the mystery that was before him. He came to realize that his little child was the one who would prepare the immediate way for the Lord. He came to understand this baby’s singular prophetic role in the salvation of the world. He saw his son as the “dawn” which was to announce the rising Sun.

So much happened to Zechariah in these months of suffering. The Lord worked on him and enabled him to offer this prayer of praise that is sung daily by priests and religious throughout the world. Zechariah truly fulfilled his mission by getting back up on his feet after his fall.

The same must happen with each one of us. It would have been easy for Zechariah to turn to anger and despair. He could have easily lost hope and felt abandoned by God. But he didn’t. He waited on the fidelity of God and, when his time came, he spoke this beautiful and faith-filled song of praise.

Reflect, today, upon how God wants you to imitate the faith and perseverance of Zechariah. It would be easy to look down on him for doubting. But God did not do this. Instead, He gave him a chance to honor Him through the ages with this song. Seek the ways that God also wants to work through your failures of the past. Offer them to Him and trust that He will manifest His almighty power through you as you seek to imitate the example of this holy man.

Lord, I offer You my past and all the ways that I have failed to trust in You. I give You my weakness, my pride and my frustration. I surrender all sin to You and give myself to You completely so that You may do with me as You will. May Your grace be at work in me and may I, like Zechariah, sing forever the glory of Your holy name. Jesus, I trust in You.