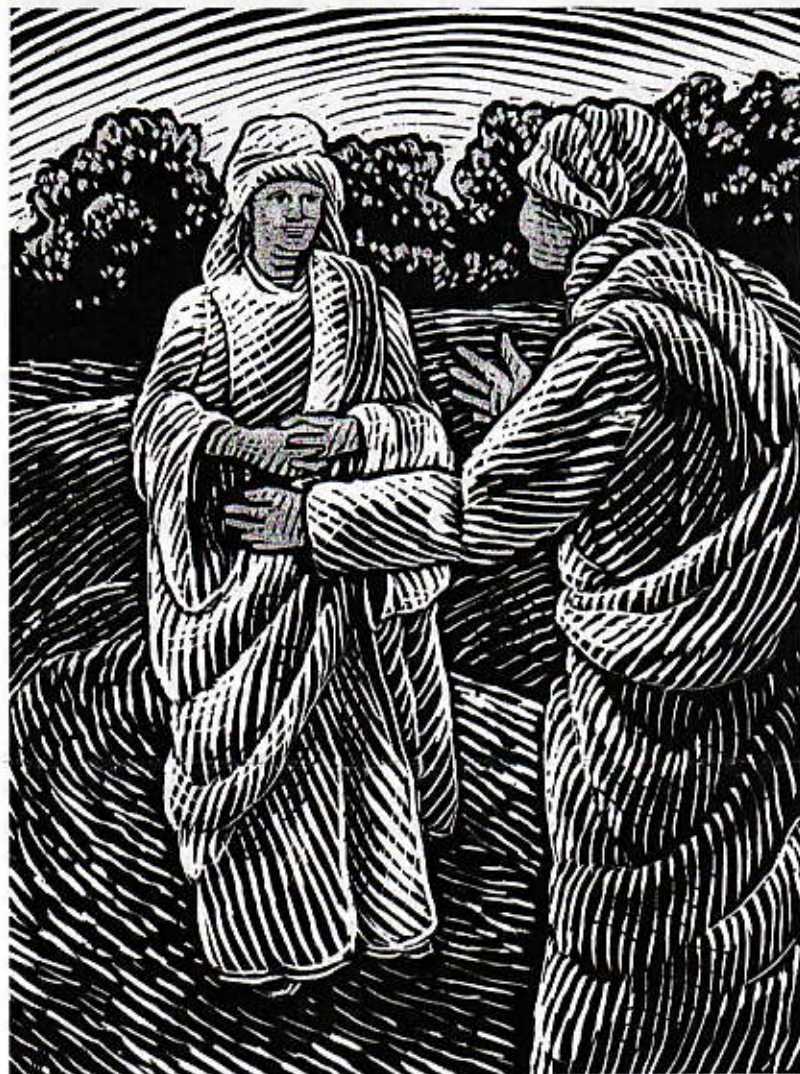


# Fourth Sunday of Advent



## Prayer of Joyful Waiting

Good and gracious Christ,  
you were born far from the seats of power—  
out of the way, in the midst of the poor.  
Yet even from such humble beginnings  
you carried the grace of God, your Father,  
to the ends of the earth.

Come and bless us in this waiting time.  
Even now, we sense your presence,  
and something in us leaps for joy.  
As Mary went to Elizabeth,  
let us go out to those we meet  
to share our joy at your coming.  
As Elizabeth cried out in joy and wonder,  
let us cry out that we too believe  
in God's presence in our very midst  
when we least expect it,  
and in the most unlikely places.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

December 20, 2009

## Elizabeth Sees Where God Is Active in the World

The prophets of the Old Testament were able to see where God was active in the world, and they called people to live authentic lives as God's children. In the Gospel today (Luke 1:39–45), Elizabeth takes on those prophetic roles. Her recognition of Mary as the mother of the Lord confirms the wonder of Mary's identity and encourages Mary to live into it. Like a prophet, Elizabeth saw where God was active in that time and place. With her last words, Elizabeth also lets us know that faith and trust in God are never wasted. Mary's gift of faith from God, nourished by her faith community, helped her to believe and say yes to the messenger who came to her.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we are taught that the sincere desire to do God's will, whatever it might be, has always meant more to God than "going through the motions" of rule and ritual. True faith results in transformation that makes the believer think and act differently toward God and the world. Out of that faith, the believer enters into prayer and liturgy to strengthen the relationship with God and to join the body of Christ in worship together. Elizabeth's words challenge us to see where God is active and to be authentically who we are, faithful people of God who offer him praise and worship and say yes to whatever he lays out for us.



# This Week at Home



## Monday, December 21

### O Oriens!

Today's O Antiphon (the refrain for the Canticle of Mary at Evening Prayer) is "O Oriens!" or "O Radiant Dawn!" (The word *oriens* is the root of the English *oriental* or *Eastern*.) The prayer following this title for Christ is adapted from Isaiah 9:1, asking God to shine on "those who lived in a land of deep darkness."

## Tuesday, December 22

### O King of All the Nations!

Now, only three days out from Christmas, our invitation to Jesus becomes more intense. He is called King of all Nations (*Rex Gentium*) and "Keystone" of a great arch that represents all of humanity. We ask Christ to come and save us whom he has fashioned from the dust.

## Wednesday, December 23

### O Emmanuel!

We close out the cycle of O Antiphons with "O Emmanuel," which means "God with us." In Isaiah 7, King Ahaz is told, "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him [E]manuel." We pray to Emmanuel to come and set us free.

## Thursday, December 24

### Putting Our Spiritual House in Order

Since December 19, we have heard the beginning of the Gospel according to Luke, which sets the stage for the birth of Jesus. We, too, have set our stage with prayer and reflection and preparations for Christmas. Reflect today on anything else you need to do to put your spiritual house in order.

## Friday, December 25

### The Coming of the Son of God

Each Gospel read at the Christmas Masses tells another and different aspect of the coming of Jesus, the Son of God and

the Messiah. Matthew's story focuses on Joseph and his trusting response to an unusual situation with his fiancée. Mary is silent here and Joseph is the obedient servant of God. For Matthew, Jesus is a child of Abraham and descendant of David. He is the new Moses who will bring God's law to the people. The nativity story in Luke is probably the most repeated. Here Mary lifts her voice in joy and love to God, and angels announce the birth of Jesus to lowly shepherds, rather than to kings. This very human birth takes place in a cattle stall; the one who will feed the five thousand lies in a feed bin. Luke portrays the miraculous nature of this birth. Jesus is the one who reaches out to the oppressed and restores what is broken.

At the Mass at dawn, Luke records that the shepherds visit Jesus and leave, praising and glorifying God, while Mary reflects on everything that has happened. Finally, John the evangelist chimes in with his beautiful poetry about the Word of God, reminding us that the Word (Christ Jesus) was with God from the beginning and, in fact, was God. John describes the unity of Jesus and the Father and the love with which the Son was made flesh and dwelt among us. The four accounts together paint a picture of who Jesus was and is for the Church.

## Saturday, December 26

### Feast of Saint Stephen

Saint Stephen is called *protomartyr* because he was the first to die witnessing to his faith. An early convert to Christianity, Stephen was among those named deacons in Acts 6, and he was known for his preaching and the signs he worked among the people. He was accused of blasphemy and was brought before the Sanhedrin who had him stoned to death. With his last breath, he asked Jesus to receive his spirit and then forgave his killers. Among those consenting to the execution was Saul who, after his conversion, would become Paul and one of the great theologians of the Church.



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Keeping the Seasons  
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