

# Second Sunday of Advent



## Prayer for Opening Our Eyes

O God,  
you who sent John the Baptist  
as a surprising forerunner  
for your Son Jesus,  
help us find you in  
unexpected people  
and surprising places.  
Don't let us miss the Good News.  
Open our eyes and hearts,  
and help us to know  
that with your grace  
we will recognize Jesus Christ  
or his messenger  
this day, this week.

We ask this through the same Lord Jesus  
Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with  
you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God  
forever and ever. Amen.

## Sunday, December 4, 2011 Prophets out of Place

Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (8); 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8. The people of John the Baptist's day, like people today, would have expected any profound religious announcement to come in its proper place: from the rabbi in the synagogue. Instead, an unorthodox preacher appeared in the Judean desert and attracted a crowd. Naturally, people might be suspicious. He didn't use polite language or worry about disturbing comfort zones. Yet those too distracted by strangeness to pay attention would miss an important message. How sad to miss the Christ to whom John the Baptist points!

What unlikely prophets live among us? What surprising spirituality have we encountered where we least expected it?

What might we be missing? Especially if we're comfortable churchgoers, we need a herald like John to shake up our own infallibility. It's sadly easy to enshrine our personal opinions and mistake our preferences for universal ideals. In the spiritual life, some uncertainty, especially regarding our impeccable selves, is useful.

Create a household "meditation piece" with some objects from today's Gospel. Arrange on sand or sandpaper a small dish of honey, a bowl of water, and a sandal. Each time you pass or pause there, consider these questions: What surprises has God sent me today? Where do they point? What message might I miss because it makes me uncomfortable?



## This Week at Home

### Monday, December 5

#### Holiday Paralysis

Today's Gospel story of Jesus curing the paralytic invites reflection on all kinds of paralysis. Depression can be especially challenging during this season. We are constantly pressured to buy and be happy. But what about those who can't afford gifts, or those who grieve? We could all reduce spending and simplify. And instead of encouraging mourners to be cheerful, we could simply be present, perhaps over tea or lunch. Today's Readings: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14; Luke 5:17-26.

### Tuesday, December 6

#### Saint Nicholas

The figure of Saint Nicholas, whose optional memorial may be celebrated today, is wreathed in legend, but the tales indicate a compassionate person, like the shepherd in today's Gospel. Encourage compassion! Family members can secretly do good deeds for each other, then leave out their shoes for a treat. Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 96:1-2, 3 and 10ac, 11-12, 13; Matthew 18:12-14.

### Wednesday, December 7

#### Memorial of Saint Ambrose

Elected Bishop of Milan by acclamation while still a catechumen, Saint Ambrose greatly influenced the Church in the fourth century and beyond. He was a friend of Saint Monica, and he baptized her son, Saint Augustine. He composed many beloved hymns, and wrote against the rampant Arian heresy. Even amid those troubles, he likely found the yoke of Jesus easy, the burden light. Are you able to rest in the gentleness of Christ that today's Gospel describes? Why or why not? Today's Readings: Isaiah 40:25-31; Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10 (1); Matthew 11:28-30.

### Thursday, December 8

#### Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

Today we celebrate Mary's unique role in human experience, that she "was redeemed from the moment of her conception" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 491). Later, as an adult, when Mary first heard the angel's news (recounted in the Gospel according to Luke), she was troubled and afraid. Yet she trusted God, who has always been faithful. Place a statue or picture of Mary in your prayer space, and sing a Marian hymn. Today's Readings: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4 (1); Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38.

### Friday, December 9

#### Optional Memorial of Saint Juan Diego

The native Mexican we honor today carried Mary's request for a chapel to a bishop who didn't believe him. Seeing Mary's image on Diego's cloak, or *tilma*, convinced the bishop to build the basilica in Mexico City. Mexican American spirituality appreciates fiesta and music. What role does music play in your spirituality? Try singing some Advent hymns at home. Today's Readings: Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, and 6; Matthew 11:16-19.

### Saturday, December 10

#### Lectio Divina

Another ancient prayer tradition is called *lectio divina*, or "sacred reading." Last Sunday's First Reading (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11) is particularly conducive for *lectio divina* prayer. Read the entire passage, then choose one phrase or verse that speaks most clearly. Repeat it slowly several times aloud, pausing in between. Some call this "chewing" the words—forming the words in your mouth as you listen closely with your heart. For instance: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." Where do you need comfort? Where do you give comfort? How does God comfort you? Today's Readings: Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Psalm 80:2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19 (4); Matthew 17:9a, 10-13.



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Keeping the Seasons

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