

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Take up the Gift of Apostleship

Father, you who give us signs of your compassion and love through the prophets you called in times past, through the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to your Son, and through the disciples you call in every age.

Now help us, we pray, to open ourselves to the gift of apostleship, as Saint Paul urges.

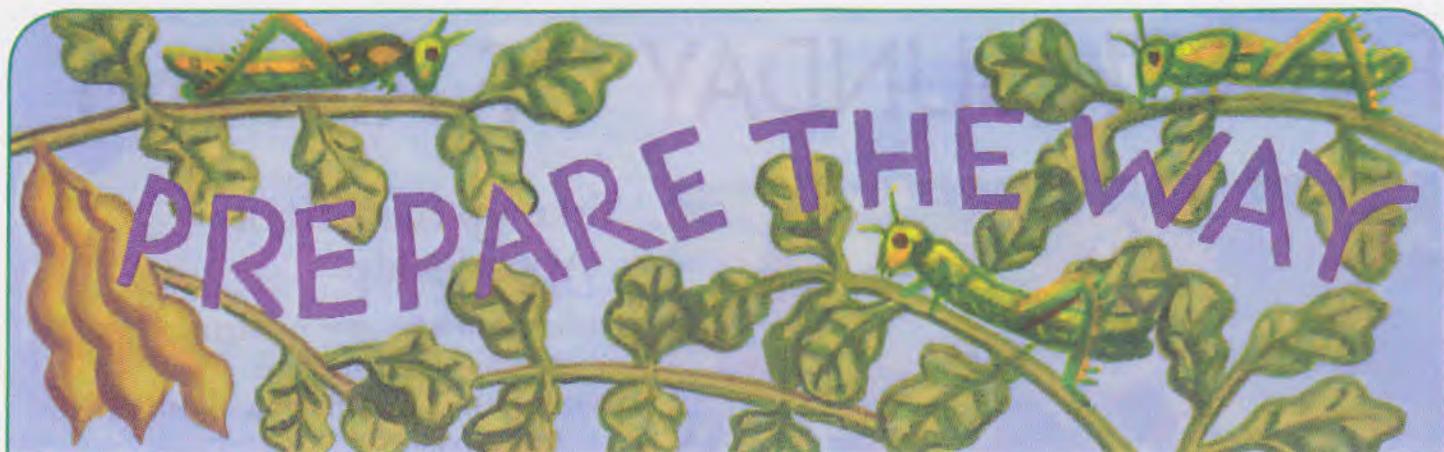
Help us to take up our call to serve in the troubled world. We rejoice in the strength and support of Emmanuel, God-with-us, and with the choirs of angels may we sing joyful carols everywhere, so that the way of Christ may be prepared, and our world will be full of faith at the day of Christ's coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 22, 2013 A Pattern for Apostleship

Today's Readings: Isaiah 7:10–14; Psalm: 24: 1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Romans 1:1–7; Matthew 1:18–24. This Sunday's Scriptures are bursting with good news for all of us. For Christians, the First Reading, from Isaiah, makes it clear that Mary and Joseph (the focus of the Gospel) are called to participate in a plan that has been unfolding for hundreds of years—a miraculous plan. Both the liturgy and the writings of the early Church emphasize that Jesus was born of a virgin mother. The response to today's Responsorial Psalm identifies this child as “King of glory,” and one of the verses calls us to “seek the face of the God of Jacob,” indicating that this royal child is a descendant of the great King David. (Today's O Antiphon is *O Rex Gentium*, O King of Nations.) Even in the midst of confounding the human circumstances that

result from these miraculous events, Mary and Joseph are models of integrity and obedience.

When we read the Gospel together with Paul's assurance that we are all called “to belong to Jesus Christ” and that Christ has given us “apostleship,” these readings encourage us to hear and to answer Christ's call. The pattern they provide for our apostleship is profound: Mary and Joseph's deep desire to do God's will, their honesty, and their prayerful, trusting response to their dilemma. St. Augustine went so far as to say that Mary's model of apostleship outweighed even her motherhood in importance (Sermon 25, 7). What does apostleship look like in your life? What exactly does it mean to you “to belong to Jesus Christ”?



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 23

O Emmanuel

God is with us! The seventh and greatest O antiphon announces the holy name. What a great gift, that our God is with us as one who knows our experience and who shares in our sufferings and sorrows, our joys and delights. When we walk the Advent pilgrimage, we find our God reborn in us once again. The first letter of each of the O antiphons spelled backwards spells the Latin words *ero, cras*, which mean “tomorrow I shall be here.” O come, O come Emmanuel! Today’s Readings: Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24; Psalm 25:4–5ab, 8–9, 10 and 14; Luke 1:57–66.

Tuesday, December 24

Vigil of the Nativity of the Lord

On this night, Eastern European Christians spread straw under the tablecloth and place on it an image of the Christ child, a large white candle (Christ as the “light of the world”) and a loaf of bread (Christ as the “bread of life”). The meal includes twelve dishes representing the Twelve Apostles. Italian households traditionally serve fish on this night. What Christmas Eve traditions do you cherish? Today’s Readings: Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29; Luke 1:67–79.

Wednesday, December 25

Nativity of the Lord

The Scripture readings proclaimed in the dark of night are some of the most beautiful—full of vivid images, serious teaching, and dramatic story. Isaiah contrasts the “land of deep darkness” in which we have been living with the “great light” of the “Prince of Peace.” Paul’s Letter to Titus teaches that the Lord has “appeared . . . training us . . . to live . . . self controlled, upright, and godly” lives. The Gospel narrates the beloved words: “Bethlehem . . . Joseph . . . Mary . . . firstborn son . . . manger . . . shepherds . . . angels.” The mystery of God born into time surrounds us

once again, always offering more for us to discover. Today’s Readings (Mass during the Night): Isaiah 9:1–6; Titus 2:11–14; Psalm 96:1–2, 2–3, 11–12, 13 (Luke 2:11); Luke 2:1–14.

Thursday, December 26

Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr

On this day after Christmas, we are reminded to embrace the whole of the Paschal Mystery (Christ’s dying and rising) in every season of the liturgical year. Stephen died as Jesus did: falsely accused and brought to unwarranted condemnation because he spoke the truth fearlessly. Pray for all those who face discrimination for proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ, especially those who face a martyr’s death. Today’s Readings: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17; Matthew 10:17–22.

Friday, December 27

Feast of St. John

The John for whom the Gospel account is named was an Apostle, called “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2). He reclined with Jesus at the Last Supper, stood beneath the Cross, and cared for Jesus’s mother. John fervently loved and trusted in the Lord. In whom do we place all our trust? Are you struggling to love God, neighbor, and self? Be open to receive the unconditional love that comes from the Prince of Peace. Today’s Readings: 1 John 1:1–4; Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 11–12; John 20:1a and 2–8.

Saturday, December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs

King Herod ordered the slaughter of boys two years old and younger in Bethlehem. This horror led Matthew to quote Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.” Rachel is pictured weeping for a later generation of Israelites who were deported by the Assyrians for a life of captivity. Pray for all children who suffer death and for an end to genocide and abortion in our day. Today’s Readings: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Psalm 124:2–3, 4–5, 7b–8; Matthew 2:13–18.



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Keeping the Seasons

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