

Third Sunday of Advent



Clear Signals as We Wait

O God,
you sent John the Baptist,
with a clear sense of his mission,
to prepare the way for Christ, your Son.
In these busy times,
give us that clarity as well.
We, too, wander in wilderness.
Alert us to hear the voice of hope.
Help us to focus on the
coming of Christ through
all our preparations.
Just as you showed John the way,
bring us also to Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever
and ever. Amen.

Sunday, December 11, 2011 Symbols of Light and Water

Today's Readings: Isaiah 61:1–2a, 10–11; Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:46–48, 49–50, 53–54; John 1:6–8, 19–28. Today's Gospel passage introduces two symbols that recur throughout the Gospel according to John, symbols full of meaning during Lent: light and water. In today's verses, Jesus is called "the light." Later in chapter 8 (v. 12), Jesus calls himself "the light of the world," which will enlighten everyone. In John 9, he cures the blind man and criticizes those who think they see light but are really blind.

In today's passage we learn that John baptizes with water, a symbol Jesus helps us understand later when he promises to give the Samaritan woman living water gushing up into eternal life (John 4:4–42). Jesus walks on water to

his frightened disciples in chapter 6 (v. 16–21), and on the Feast of Tabernacles he promises, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and . . . drink" (7:37). From Christ, living water will flow into believers. At the Last Supper, Jesus tells a protesting Peter that he must have his feet washed in water or he will have "no share with me" (13:8). That "share" (or "inheritance") includes the long flow of God's love that began in Genesis and continues through our day.

In a terrible irony, the source of refreshment will be Christ himself, thirsty on the cross (John 19:28). When the soldier pierces Jesus' side, "blood and water" flow out (19:34), an image that adds even more intensity to this symbol of Christian Baptism.



This Week at Home

Monday, December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

If you can find an early morning celebration of *Las Mañanitas* nearby, try to attend. Mexican American Catholics gather to celebrate, through song and story, Mary's appearance to Juan Diego. Mary is dressed as a pregnant Mexican native, bringing hope and courage to the oppressed peoples of Central and South America.

If you've placed a statue or picture of Mary in your prayer space (see December 8), add flowers today. The traditional roses in December remind us of the angel Gabriel's words at the Annunciation, "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Today's Readings: Zechariah 2:14-17; Responsorial Psalm: Judith 13:18bcde, 19; Luke 1:26-38.

Tuesday, December 13

Memorial of Saint Lucy

Today's Gospel about one son who refused his father's request, then accepted it later, and the other son who initially agreed, but never did the job, leads us to think of saints like Lucy. In a variety of ways, the saints have said "yes" to God: some as martyrs or theologians; others as artists or poets; some as parents, priests, or nuns. In Swedish homes today, the oldest daughter wears a crown of lit candles (*Lucy* means "light") and brings her family breakfast—a traditional way of celebrating this light-filled memorial during a dark and wintry season. Today's Readings: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19, and 23 (7a); Matthew 21:28-32.

Wednesday, December 14

Memorial of Saint John of the Cross

Saint John of the Cross was one of the finest poets to write in Spanish, and a great help to Saint Teresa of Avila in her reform of the Carmelite order. He used the symbols of light and dark to describe an intense experience of God in prison. Looking back on Sunday's references to light and water

imagery in John's Gospel account, reflect: Where is the light in your life? In what darkness do you need more illumination? Where do you find water or refreshment? Today's Readings: Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21b-25; Psalm 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14; Luke 7:18b-23.

Thursday, December 15

Preparations around the World

Today's Gospel describes how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. By now, most people are deep into Christmas preparations. Each culture has its own way of preparing for the birth. The *Parrandas* is a Puerto Rican caroling party where, at each stop, those who've been serenaded join the singers (see http://www.elboricua.com/pr_christmas.html). The *Simbang Gabi* is a nine-day Filipino novena to Mary, including processions (http://www.rcam.org/library/SIMBANG_GABI.htm), which start tomorrow at dawn and end with Christmas Eve's *Misa de Gallo* or "Mass of the Rooster." Today's Readings: Isaiah 54:1-10; Psalm 30:2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b (2a); Luke 7:24-30.

Friday, December 16

Las Posadas

For the next nine days, many Mexican American Catholics will walk through their neighborhoods, singing and looking for shelter. They'll represent the Holy Family and will sometimes carry crèche figures. On Christmas Eve, doors will finally open to a feast and welcome. Today's Readings: Isaiah 56:1-3a, 6-8; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 7-8 (4); John 5:33-36.

Saturday, December 17

O Antiphons

During the last week of Advent, the Church chants the O Antiphons at Evening Prayer. These poetic refrains use many of Christ's titles, and have been popularized in the song, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Today we ask for Wisdom to show the way. Today's Readings: Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17 (see 7); Matthew 1:1-17.

