

December 24-30

Fourth Sunday of Advent B/Christmas

Church Begins at Home

An Advent/Christmas Hymn for the Week

(can be read or sung after lighting the Advent wreath)

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room
And heav'n and nature sing.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)



Daily Readings

SUNDAY'S GOSPEL Luke 1:26-38

This event is sometimes called "The Annunciation" — it is the announcement to Mary that she will bear a son who will be God's Messiah, the Son of David. The story makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people (Mary) from little-known places (Nazareth). The king will be born not to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall.

MONDAY Luke 2:1-20 **Christmas Day**

[Turn the devotion sheet over to the "Christmas" side today.] In the ancient world, the new day was considered to start at sunset rather than at midnight, so the church traditionally begins its celebration of festivals at sunset. That is why we consider Christmas Eve the beginning of Christmas. Today we read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus.

TUESDAY Acts 6:8—7:2a, 51-60

December 26 is the Festival of St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr. When a dispute about favoritism arose in the early Christian community, the twelve apostles appointed Stephen and six others to be deacons to oversee the distribution of food. Stephen's zeal in proclaiming his faith in Jesus gets him arrested and brought to trial. He charges his audience with not keeping the law and murdering Jesus. They respond by stoning him to death. Stephen becomes the first in a long line of Christian martyrs.

WEDNESDAY 1 John 1:1—2:2

December 27 is the Festival of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist. John was a fisherman when he responded to Jesus' call. Tradition holds that John wrote the gospel and three short letters that bear his name and that he was the only disciple not to be martyred, dying in Ephesus at the age of 100. In these opening words of 1 John, you will notice words (vv. 9-10) we often include in the Order of Confession and Forgiveness on Sunday mornings.

THURSDAY Matthew 2:13-18

December 28 is the Festival of The Holy Innocents, Martyrs. It recalls this story recorded in Matthew's gospel of King Herod attempt to kill Jesus, who he perceived to be a rival and threat to his throne.

FRIDAY Hebrews 1:1-4

The letter to the Hebrews opens with this beautiful passage, acknowledging that God has spoken to his people in many ways over the centuries, but now he has spoken to us most clearly in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY Luke 2:22-40 (Tomorrow's Gospel reading)

Luke's account of the birth of Jesus continues with this account of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the temple so that Mary might go through the ritual of purification which the Law prescribed for mothers after giving birth. At the temple, Joseph and Mary meet two elderly "seers" who tell them surprising things about their new son.

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

Blessed are you, O Lord
our God, ruler of the
universe.

In your Son, Emmanuel,
you have shown the
light of your
countenance, and
saved us from our sins.

Bless us as we light the
candles on this wreath.

Increase our longing for
your presence, that at
the celebration of your
Son's birth, his Spirit
might dwell anew in our
midst, for he is our
light and our salvation.
Amen