



ADVENT REFLECTIONS FOR 2019

Week One



From Pope Francis Angelus 2nd December 2018

Today, Advent begins, the liturgical time which prepares us for Christmas, inviting us to lift our gaze and open our hearts to welcome Jesus. During Advent we do not just live in anticipation of Christmas; we are also called to rekindle the anticipation of the glorious return of Christ — when he will return at the end of time — preparing ourselves, with consistent and courageous choices, for the final encounter with him. We remember Christmas, we await the glorious return of Christ, and also our personal encounter: the day in which the Lord will call.

During these four weeks we are called to leave behind a resigned and routine way of life and to go forth, nourishing hope, nourishing dreams for a new future.

To be *mindful* and to *pray*: this is how to live the time between now and Christmas. To be mindful and to pray. Inner listlessness comes from always turning around ourselves and being blocked by our own life, with its problems, its joy, and suffering, but always turning around ourselves. And this is wearying; this is dull, this closes us off to hope. Here lies the root of the lethargy and laziness that the Gospel speaks about. Advent invites us to a commitment to vigilance, looking beyond ourselves, expanding our mind and heart in order to open ourselves up to the needs of people, of brothers and sisters, and to the desire for a new world. It is the desire of many people tormented by hunger, by injustice and by war. It is the desire of the poor, the weak, the abandoned. This is a favourable time to open our hearts, to ask ourselves concrete questions about how and for whom we expend our lives.

THIS RESOURCE

As we begin the season of Advent for 2019, we are mindful of how short it is and how easy it is to pass us by. As Pope Francis reminds us, Advent is a time to be 'mindful and pray'.

To help us with our spiritual preparation this Advent, we offer four personal reflections – one for each week of Advent - on the important themes of this beautiful season. Each reflection is easy to use in groups OR personally. Each reflection gives us the opportunity to pray, to ponder and to listen to our speakers reflect on our understanding of the season. Some questions help us to go deeper, personally or as a group. We suggest taking one a week, but if you have a parish retreat day these could provide the materials you might want to use for your time together

We are grateful to Gavin D'Costa, Laura Stotesbury, Fr. Tom Dubois and Sarah Richards for their reflective contributions which will help us to engage more fully with Advent and its rich themes.

ADVENT REFLECTION TIME

The challenge of the Annunciation

Prayer for Advent

Let the world hold its breath,
for good is coming in all its vulnerable newness.
Deep within our life a wonder is conceived,
hidden in humanity's moments of faithfulness.
Look for it, for it is near.
Believe in it, for it is of God.
Be ready to nurture its life among us,
for it is a precious gift for all history.

In the Spirit of Advent
We watch for signs of that which is to come.
We look for them here in this place,
held within our midst in promises of joy.

Holy God, this is earth's quiet season, the season of waiting.
Let us rest in the shelter of your love.
This is the season of darkness,
when we seek stars to guide us.
May we trust in the light of your promise.

This is the season of solitude,
when we listen for our own heart's rhythm.
May we find warmth in the signs of your presence and when
the time comes rejoice as one in the mystery of the incarnation
of our God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

WE LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD FROM LUKE 2:6-33

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.





Words of Pope Francis

Humility is the “golden rule”. “Advancing”, for Christians, means “lowering themselves”. It is precisely on the humble path, chosen by God, that love and charity proceed.

The whole history of faith is made of humility and “speaks of humility to us all”. This likewise applies to the historical event of Jesus' Birth. It seems that God wanted every event “to be concealed, that it not be made public”, that it be, as it were, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit”. This is why, everything happens on the road of humility. God, humble, lowers himself: he comes among us and lowers himself — and he continues to humble himself even to the Cross.

“Mary”, at the Annunciation, also humbles herself: she does not properly understand, but she is free: she grasps only the essential and says ‘yes’. She is humble: ‘May God's will be done’. She entrusts her soul to God's will”. “

Reflection : Gavin D'Costa

This will need to be downloaded from Cliftondiocese.com

Questions for Conversation

What struck you about Gavin's reflection? Was there anything which was new to you?

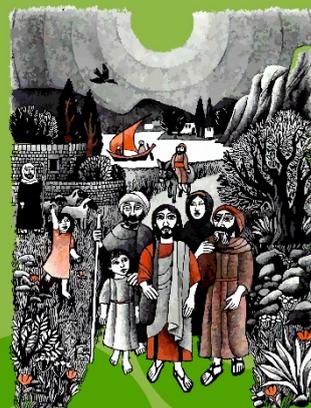
In what ways might Mary have struggled before she responded with her 'Yes'?

Gavin suggests that, for us, to celebrate that 'yes' of Mary we need to 'face our own human darkness' with the same trust of Mary. Can we do it? Can we 'say that 'yes' again and what would it take for us to do that? What would need to be different or what might we need to change?

When you come to the end of your conversation re-read the Scripture passage again. You may like to finish your time of reflection with a time of silence prayer or intercession after which you might pray the **Hail Mary or the Angelus**

Final Prayer

Loving God, fill us with your wonder
and keen anticipation for the glory to be revealed.
Take us from unfitting fear and give us an expectation of renewal.
Speak to us of your enduring nearness
as we draw near to you in prayer.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



WHERE TWO OR
THREE MEET IN MY
NAME I AM THERE
AMONG THEM

MATTHEW 18:20

A FUTURE
FULL OF HOPE
CLIFTON DIOCESE

COMMUNION