

Chapter VI: Advent-Christmas Day

"Lord Jesus, You came to gather the nations in the peace of God's Kingdom...You will come in glory bringing salvation to your people." -Order of Mass, penitential rite

The Season of Advent

Character of the Advent Season

Advent inaugurates the beginning of the liturgical year; it is the four-week period during which the Church prepares to celebrate Christmas. Advent has a twofold character. In addition to being a time of preparation for the commemoration of Jesus' first coming into the world, it is also directed to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is a season of joyful and spiritual expectation.¹

Advent is not simply a preparation to commemorate the historical event of Christmas nor primarily and expectation of the *parousia*, but it is rather an anticipation or a beginning of the celebration of the integral mystery of the incarnation, the advent and epiphany of the Son of God in flesh and in majesty. The Christian community lives in an "interim" time between two historical events: the coming of Christ in the flesh and his coming in glory at the end of time.² The Church is called to be strong in faith, "as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."³

Historically, in some parts of the Church where baptism was once celebrated at Epiphany, the forty days prior to it were devoted to ascetical preparation, and Advent took on several of the liturgical features of Lent. Now, however, "it is no longer considered a penitential season but a time of joyful expectation."⁴

Advent is a time of waiting, conversion and of hope:

~**waiting**-memory of the first, humble coming of the Lord in our mortal flesh; waiting-supplication for his final, glorious coming as Lord of History and universal Judge;

~**conversion**, to which the Liturgy at this time often refers quoting the prophets, especially John the Baptist, *Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matt 3:2);

~**joyful hope** that the salvation already accomplished by Christ (cf. Roman 8: 24-25) and the reality of grace in the world, will mature and reach their fulness, thereby granting us what is promised by faith, and *we shall become like him for we shall see him as he really is* (John 3:2).⁵

¹ United States Catholic Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Pastoral Practices. *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*. November 12, 2000. www.usccb.org/dpp/penitential.htm, cf. *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* [hereafter *GPLY*], no. 39.

² Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Liturgical Office. *Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Hours*. [hereafter *SCWH*], Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes, no. 5.

³ Order of Mass, Communion Rite. cf. Titus 2:13: "as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ"

⁴ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Liturgical Office. *Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Hours*. [hereafter *SCWH*], Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes, no. 6. cf. *GPLY*, no. 39.

⁵ *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* [hereafter *DPPL*]. December 17, 2001. no. 96.

This twofold character is reflected in the two stages of Advent, each with its own special focus expressed in the corresponding preface of the eucharistic prayer. From the first Sunday to 16 December, the liturgy expresses the eschatological expectation of Advent, the watchfulness of God's people looking forward to the time when Christ will come again in glory and majesty, and "the salvation promised us will be ours." (Advent Preface I) From 17 December until Christmas eve, the texts proper to each day prepare us more directly to celebrate the Lord's birth, "our hearts filled with wonder and praise." (Advent Preface II)⁶

Advent, as a period of expectation and preparation, is closely related to, yet distinct from the feast of Christmas for which it prepares. This can create a certain tension in those places where the weeks before Christmas are exploited for commercial purposes or where social celebrations of the feast are anticipated in schools and places of work.⁷

Popular piety, because of its intuitive understanding of the Christian mystery, can contribute effectively to the conservation of many of the values of Advent, which are not infrequently threatened by the commercialization of Christmas and consumer superficiality.

School and other communities unable to be together on Christmas Day itself are encouraged to arrange Christmas celebrations within the season of Christmas, i.e. between the time of Christmas Day and the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, rather than during Advent. This is to avoid compromising the keeping of the season of Advent, and provide an opportunity to better indicate the distinction between the Christian feast of Christmas and the associated secular celebrations.⁸

Popular piety perceives that it is impossible to celebrate the Lord's birth except in an atmosphere of sobriety and joyous simplicity and of concern for the poor and margin[alized]. The expectation of the Lord's birth makes us sensitive to the value of life and the duties to respect and defend it from conception. Popular piety intuitively understands that it is not possible coherently to celebrate the birth of him "who saves his people from their sins" without some effort to overcome sin in one's own life, while waiting vigilantly for Him who will return at the end of time.⁹

Advent Lectionary

Sundays of Advent

Each Gospel reading has a distinctive theme: the Lord's coming at the end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sunday), and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth (Fourth Sunday). The Old Testament readings are prophecies about the Messiah and the Messianic age, especially from the Book of Isaiah. The readings from an Apostle [Paul] contain exhortations and proclamations, in keeping with the different themes of Advent.¹⁰

⁶ Conference of Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, National Liturgical Office. Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes. <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Seasons/Advent.pdf>

⁷ SCWH, Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes, no. 6.

⁸ Conference of Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, National Liturgical Office. Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes. <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Seasons/Advent.pdf>

⁹ DPPL, no. 105.

¹⁰ *Lectionary for Mass* [hereafter *LM*], no. 93.

Advent Weekday Readings

In the first part of Advent there are readings from the Book of Isaiah, distributed in accord with the sequence of the book itself and including the more important texts that are also read on the Sundays. For the choice of the weekday Gospel the first reading has been taken into consideration. On Thursday of the second week the readings from the Gospel concerning John the Baptist begin. The first reading is either a continuation of Isaiah or a text chosen in view of the Gospel.¹¹

There are two series of readings: one to be used from the beginning of Advent until 16 December; the other from 17 to 24 December. In the last week before Christmas the events that immediately prepared for the Lord's birth are presented from the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 1) and Luke (chapter 1). The texts in the first reading, chosen in view of the Gospel reading, are from different Old Testament books and include important Messianic prophecies.¹²

Three Comings of the Lord?

This is a famous excerpt from a sermon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*Sermo 5, In Adventu Domini*, 1-3: *Opera Omnia*, Edit. Cisterc. 4 [1966], 188-190. It is used in the Office of Readings for Wednesday of the First Week of Advent. *It speaks of not 2 but 3 comings of the Lord.*

We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. In the first coming he was seen on earth, dwelling among men; he himself testifies that they saw him and hated him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God, and they will look on him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved. In his first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming he comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming he will be seen in glory and majesty.

In case someone should think that what we say about this middle coming is sheer invention, listen to what our Lord himself says: *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him.* [John 14:23] There is another passage of Scripture which reads: *He who fears God will do good*, but something further has been said about the one who loves, that is, that he will keep God's word. Where is God's word to be kept? Obviously in the heart, as the prophet says: *I have hidden your words in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.* [Ps. 119:11]

Advent Vesture & Environment

Violet: the Color of Advent

The purpose of a variety in the color of the sacred vestments is to give effective expression even outwardly to the specific character of the mysteries of faith being celebrated and to a sense of Christian life's passage through the course of the liturgical year. The traditional color used for sacred

¹¹ LM, no.94.

¹² LM, no.94.

vestments in the Roman (Latin) Rite during Advent is violet or purple. Rose may be used, where it is the practice, on *Gaudete* Sunday (Third Sunday of Advent).¹³

The use of violet in Advent suggests a state of unfulfilled readiness and should no longer be regarded solely as an expression of penitence. It serves to set off the joyful white of Christmas with greater dramatic effect.¹⁴

To distinguish between this season and the specifically penitential season of Lent, bluer hues of violet may be used during Advent. Neither light nor dark hues of blue are authorized for use during Advent in the dioceses of the United States.¹⁵

The Liturgical Year: Seasonal Decorations

During the liturgical year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth through his passion, death, and resurrection to his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his coming in glory. In its celebration of these mysteries, the Church makes these sacred events present to the people of every age.¹⁶

Plans for seasonal decorations should include other areas besides the sanctuary. Decorations are *intended to draw people to the true nature of the mystery being celebrated rather than being ends in themselves*. Natural flowers, plants, wreaths and fabric hangings, and other seasonal objects can be arranged to enhance the primary liturgical points of focus.¹⁷ The use of living flowers and plants, rather than artificial greens, serves as a reminder of the gift of life God has given to the human community. Planning for plants and flowers should include not only the procurement and placement but also the continuing care needed to sustain living things.¹⁸

Objects such as the Advent wreath, the Christmas crib, and other traditional seasonal appointments proportioned to the size of the space and to the other furnishings can enhance the prayer and understanding of the parish community.¹⁹

¹³ *GIRM*, nos. 345-6.

¹⁴ Conference of Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, National Liturgical Office. Season of Advent: Pastoral Notes. <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Seasons/Advent.pdf>

¹⁵ *The Order of Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours and Celebration of the Eucharist 2009*, (a.k.a. *Ordo*) Advent Pastoral Notations, p. 1.

¹⁶ *BLS*, no. 122. cf. *SC* no. 102: Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it on certain days throughout the course of the year. Every week, on the day which she has called the Lord's day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection, which she also celebrates once in the year, together with His blessed passion, in the most solemn festival of Easter.

Within the cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord.

Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace.

¹⁷ *BLS*, no. 124.

¹⁸ *BLS*, no. 129.

¹⁹ *BLS*, no 128. cf. *BB*, nos. 1512, 1544.

The altar should always remain clear and free-standing, not walled in by massive floral displays or the Christmas crib, and pathways in the narthex, nave, and sanctuary should remain clear.²⁰ Floral decorations should always be done with moderation and placed around the altar rather than on its *mensa*. [table top] Moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar. During Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this season, without expressing prematurely the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord.²¹

These seasonal decorations are maintained throughout the entire liturgical season. Since the Christmas season begins with the Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and ends with the Baptism of the Lord, the placement and removal of Christmas decorations should coincide with these times.²²

Musical restraint during Advent

At other times, the liturgical season calls for a certain musical restraint. In Advent, for example, musical instruments should be used with moderation and should not anticipate the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord.²³

The *Gloria* is a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other text. . . . It is sung or said on Sundays outside the Seasons of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character.

Advent in the Home

Placing four candles on green fronds has become a symbol of Advent in many Christian homes, especially in the Germanic countries and in North America. The Advent wreath, with the progressive lighting of its four candles, Sunday after Sunday, until the Solemnity of Christmas, is a recollection of the various stages of salvation history prior to Christ's coming and a symbol of the prophetic light gradually illuminating the long night prior to the rising of the Sun of justice (cf. Mt 3,20; Lk 1,78).²⁴

As is well known, in addition to the representations of the crib found in churches since antiquity, the custom of building cribs in the home was widely promoted from the thirteenth century, influenced undoubtedly by St. Francis of Assisi's crib in Greccio. Their preparation, in which children play a significant role, is an occasion for the members of the family to come into contact with the mystery of Christmas, as they gather for a moment of prayer or to read the biblical accounts of the Lord's birth.²⁵

²⁰ BLS, no. 124.

²¹ GIRM, no. 305.

²² BLS, no. 125.

²³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, [hereafter, *STL*] issued November 14, 2007, no. 114. cf. GIRM, no. 313.

²⁴ DPPL, no. 98.

²⁵ DPPL, no. 104.

Seasons with a focus on Mary

Woven through the Advent and Christmas seasons are major Marian feasts. In Advent two celebrations are particularly important to the church in the Americas: the *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*—the title under which Mary is the patroness of the United States—and the *Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*—the title under which Mary is patroness of all the Americas. The new year begins with the *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*—the ancient title that links Mary to the whole celebration of the incarnation. Be sure to plan appropriately for these feasts so that they are celebrated as part of the seasons in which they shine.

The Blessed Virgin Mary and Advent²⁶

The Liturgy frequently celebrates the Blessed Virgin Mary in an exemplary way during the season of Advent. It recalls the women of the Old Testament who prefigured and prophesied her mission; it exalts her faith and the humility with which she promptly and totally submitted to God's plan of salvation; it highlights her presence in the events of grace preceding the birth of the Saviour. Popular piety also devotes particular attention to the Blessed Virgin Mary during Advent, as is evident from the many pious exercises practised at this time, especially the novena of the Immaculate Conception and of Christmas. However, the significance of Advent, "that time which is particularly apt for the cult of the Mother of God", is such that it cannot be represented merely as a "Marian month".

In the calendars of the Oriental [Catholic] Churches, the period of preparation for the celebration of the manifestation (Advent) of divine salvation (Theophany) in the mysteries of Christmas-Epiphany of the Only Son of God, is markedly Marian in character. Attention is concentrated on preparation for the Lord's coming in the *Deipara*. For the Orientals, all Marian mysteries are Christological mysteries since they refer to the mystery of our salvation in Christ. In the Coptic rite, the Lauds of the Virgin Mary are sung in the *Theotokia*. Among the Syrians, Advent is referred to as the *Subbara* or Annunciation, so as to highlight its Marian character. The Byzantine Rite prepares for Christmas with a whole series of Marian feasts and rituals.

The approach of Christmas is celebrated throughout the American continent with many displays of popular piety, centered on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (12 December), which dispose the faithful to receive the Saviour at his birth. Mary, who was "intimately united with the birth of the Church in America, became the radiant Star illuminating the proclamation of Christ the Saviour to the sons of these nations".

The Marian Antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater*

At Night Prayer (Compline) the Marian Antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is traditionally used from the First Sunday of Advent and through the Christmas season.²⁷ Pope John Paul reflected on the theology of the *Alma* in a 1987 encyclical: "At the end of the daily Liturgy of the Hours, among the invocations addressed to Mary by the Church is the following:

*'Loving Mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator!'*

²⁶ DPPL: 101-2.

²⁷ Congregation for Divine Worship, *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, [hereafter *GILH*] no. 92.

‘To the wonderment of nature!’ These words of the antiphon express that wonderment of faith which accompanies the mystery of Mary’s divine motherhood. The words of this liturgical antiphon also express the truth of the “great transformation” which the mystery of the Incarnation establishes for man. The Advent liturgy in particular is at the very heart of this transformation and captures its unceasing “here and now” when it exclaims: ‘Assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again!’²⁸

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception - Holy day of Obligation

Novena for the Immaculate Conception

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception begins with Evening Prayer I on Monday, December 7, and concludes with the celebration of Evening Prayer II of the Solemnity on Tuesday December 8th.

Remember, that while the *Gloria* is omitted on the Sundays and weekdays of Advent, but it is **sung** on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is profoundly influential among the faithful, is an occasion for many displays of popular piety and especially for the novena of the Immaculate Conception. There can be no doubt that the feast of the pure and sinless Conception of the Virgin Mary, which is a fundamental preparation for the Lord’s coming into the world, harmonizes perfectly with many of the salient themes of Advent. This feast also makes reference to the long messianic waiting for the Saviour’s birth and recalls events and prophecies from the Old Testament, which are also used in the Liturgy of Advent.

The novena of the Immaculate Conception, wherever it is celebrated, should highlight the prophetic texts which begin with Genesis 3,15, and end in Gabriel’s salutation of the one who is “full of grace” (Lk 1:31-33).

There is a suggested text for the Novena prayers at the end of this chapter.

Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady Guadalupe

Saint Juan Diego *Cuauhtlatoatzin* (1474-1548). Little is known about the life of Juan Diego before his conversion, but tradition and archaeological and iconographical sources, along with the most important and oldest indigenous document on the event of Guadalupe, “*El Nican Mopohua*” (written in *Náhuatl* with Latin characters, 1556, by the Indigenous writer Antonio Valeriano), give some information on the life of the saint and the apparitions.

Juan Diego was born in 1474 with the name “*Cuauhtlatoatzin*” (“the talking eagle”) in *Cuautlilán*, today part of Mexico City, Mexico. He was a gifted member of the *Chichimeca* people, one of the more culturally advanced groups living in the *Anáhuac* Valley.

When he was 50 years old he was baptized by a Franciscan priest, Fr Peter da Gand, one of the first Franciscan missionaries. On 9 December 1531, when Juan Diego was on his way to morning Mass, the Blessed Mother appeared to him on Tepeyac Hill, the outskirts of what is now Mexico City. She asked him to go to the Bishop and to request in her name that a shrine be built at Tepeyac, where she

²⁸ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church*. March 25, 1987. nos. 51-2.

promised to pour out her grace upon those who invoked her. The Bishop, who did not believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign to prove that the apparition was true. On 12 December, Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac. Here, the Blessed Mother told him to climb the hill and to pick the flowers that he would find in bloom. He obeyed, and although it was winter time, he found roses flowering. He gathered the flowers and took them to Our Lady who carefully placed them in his mantle and told him to take them to the Bishop as “proof”. When he opened his mantle, the flowers fell on the ground and there remained impressed, in place of the flowers, an image of the Blessed Mother, the apparition at Tepeyac.

With the Bishop’s permission, Juan Diego lived the rest of his life as a hermit in a small hut near the chapel where the miraculous image was placed for veneration. Here he cared for the church and the first pilgrims who came to pray to the Mother of Jesus. Much deeper than the “exterior grace” of having been “chosen” as Our Lady’s “messenger”, Juan Diego received the grace of interior enlightenment and from that moment, he began a life dedicated to prayer and the practice of virtue and boundless love of God and neighbour. He died in 1548 and was buried in the first chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. He was beatified on 6 May 1990 by Pope John Paul II in the Basilica of Santa Maria de Guadalupe, Mexico City.

The miraculous image, which is preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, shows a woman with native features and dress. She is supported by an angel whose wings are reminiscent of one of the major gods of the traditional religion of that area. The moon is beneath her feet and her blue mantle is covered with gold stars. The black girdle about her waist signifies that she is pregnant. Thus, the image graphically depicts the fact that Christ is to be “born” again among the peoples of the New World, and is a message as relevant to the “New World” today as it was during the lifetime of Juan Diego.²⁹

The use of Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II during Advent

The eschatological character of Advent is strong. It is also a season of penitence and conversion. Consequently, it is both appropriate and allowed to use the Eucharistic Prayers “For Reconciliation”. When the prayers for reconciliation were promulgated in 1983 for the Holy Year of Reconciliation the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments noted that while they have their own prefaces, these prayers could be used with other prefaces of penitential character, such as those for Lent or Advent.³⁰ The Second Eucharistic prayer (R 2), which speaks of “*your Son who comes in your name*” and envisions the universal eschatological banquet: “*in that new world where the fullness of your peace will be revealed,*” composed of “*people of every race, language and way of life,*” is particularly suited to the penitential and eschatological themes of Advent.

Special Collection SECOND SUNDAY IN DECEMBER

Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR). The Retirement Fund for Religious has generated an unprecedented response from U.S. Catholics. Since 1988, the RFR has distributed over **\$426 million** through restricted grants to any religious institute in the United States that has an unfunded past service liability and both basic, supplemental and special assistance retirement grants to religious institutes based on a formula and criteria approved by the conferences of major superiors and bishops. **Ninety-six percent** of the donations are invested for present and future retirement needs of the elderly

²⁹ www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20020731_juan-diego_en.html

³⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Notitiae* 19 (1983), p. 270.

members (religious sisters, brothers, and religious order priests) of the over 500 religious institutes in the United States. Today, nearly 60,000 religious men and women are over the age of 60.

For more information, visit www.usccb.org/nrro

O Antiphons

December 17

O Sapientia,
quæ ex ore Altissimi prodiisti,
attingens a fine usque ad finem,
fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia:
veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiæ.

O Wisdom,
Who has come from the mouth of the Most High,
Reaching one end to the other,
[and] boldly, tenderly orders all things:
come, teach us the way of prudence.

December 18

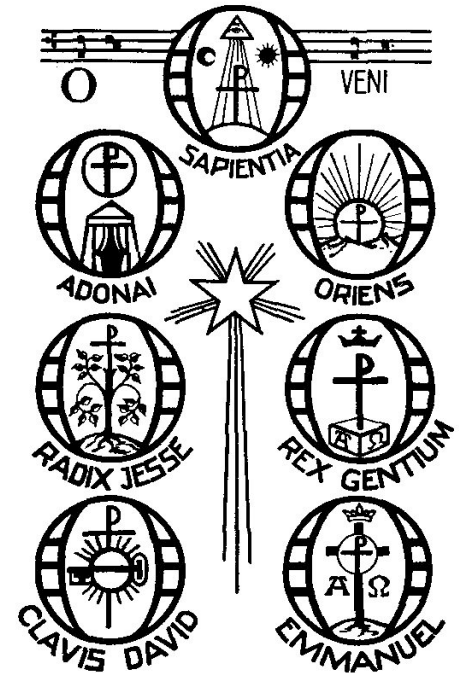
O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel,
qui Moysi in igne flammæ rubi apparuisti,
et ei in Sina legem dedisti:
veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

O Adonai, and Leader of the House of Israel,
Who appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush,
And gave him the Law on Sinai;
Come, to redeem us with outstretched arm.

December 19

O Radix Jesse,
qui stas in signum populorum,
super quem continebunt reges os suum,
quem Gentes deprecabuntur:
veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse,
who stands [a] standard³¹ in the people
before whom kings shall keep their mouths shut;³²
whom the Nations shall entreat
Come and redeem us, do not delay



³¹ (*Compact Oxford Dictionary*) **standard**

• noun 5 a military or ceremonial flag. 7 a tree that grows on an erect stem of full height. 8 a shrub grafted on an erect stem and trained in tree form

³² **quotation derived from Isaiah 52:15.** “Super ipsum continebunt reges os suum” Douay version: “kings shall shut their mouth at him:”

December 20

O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel;
qui aperis, et nemo claudit;
claudis, et nemo aperit:
veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

**O Key of David, Scepter of the house of Israel,
Who opens and no one closes,
Closes and none opens:
Come, and lead from bondage those in prison,
Sitting in darkness and the shadow of death**

December 21

O Oriens,
splendor lucis æternæ, et sol justitiæ:
veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris,
et umbra mortis.

**O Dayspring,
Splendor of eternal light and Sun of Justice
Come, bring light to those who sit in darkness
And the shadow of death.**

December 22

O Rex Gentium,
et desideratus earum,
lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum:
veni, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

**O King of the Nations,
And their desire;
Cornerstone who makes of two one.
Come and save the people, whom you fashioned from the earth.**

December 23

O Emmanuel,
Rex et legifer noster, exspectatio gentium,
et Salvator earum:
veni ad salvandum nos Domine Deus noster.

**O Emmanuel,
Our King and Lawgiver, Longed-for one of the Gentiles,
and our Savior:
Come to save us Lord our God.**

Placement and Blessing of a Christmas Manger/Nativity Scene/Creche'

In its present form the custom of displaying figures depicting the birth of Jesus Christ owes its origin to Saint Francis of Assisi who made the Christmas creche or manger for Christmas eve of 1223. However, as early as the fourth century representations of the nativity of the Lord were painted as wall decorations depicting not only the infancy narrative accounts of Christ's birth, but also the words of the prophets Isaiah and Habakkuk taken to mean that the Messiah would be born in the midst of animals in a manger.³³

The blessing of the Christmas manger or nativity scene, according to pastoral circumstances, may take place on the Vigil of Christmas or at another more suitable time. The blessing may be given during a celebration of the word of God, during Mass, or even during another service, e.g., a carol service.³⁴

If the manger is set up in the church, it must not be placed in the *presbyterium* [i.e. the sanctuary]. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful.³⁵

The practice of placing the manger under or on the altar is not proper since it devalues the nature of the altar and makes it only a setting for the crib.³⁶ The altar should always remain clear and free-standing, not walled in by massive floral displays or the Christmas crib, and pathways in the narthex, nave, and sanctuary should remain clear.³⁷

The Christmas Season

*Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being,
and the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach.
Angels with shepherds give glory, and magi journey with a star,
for to us there has been born a little Child: God before the ages.*³⁸ - St. Romanos Melodos

Christmas Season³⁹

Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season. The Christmas season runs from Evening Prayer I of Christmas until the Sunday after Epiphany or after 6 January (The Baptism of the Lord), inclusive. The solemnity of the Lord's birth celebrates the mystery

³³ BB, 1541.

³⁴ BB, 1542-3.

³⁵ BB, 1544.

³⁶ BCL Newsletter Vol. XXV (1989) October/November as found in: *Thirty Five Years of the BCL Newsletter 1965-2000*. (Washington, DC: USCCB Publications, 2004), p.1177.

³⁷ BLS, no 124.

³⁸ *Kontakion for the Nativity: Prooemium*. cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 525. also see: Isa. 9:5, Ps. 73(74):12.

³⁹ GNLY, no. 32.

of the incarnation by which the Word of God humbled himself to share in our humanity, in order that he might enable us to become sharers in his divinity.⁴⁰

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night:

*The Virgin today brings into the world the Eternal
And the earth offers a cave to the Inaccessible.
The angels and shepherds praise him
And the magi advance with the star,
For you are born for us,
Little Child, God eternal!*⁴¹

To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little. Even more: to become "children of God" we must be "born from above" or "born of God". Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this "marvelous exchange":

*O marvelous exchange
the creator of the human race, taking on a human body
has deigned to be born of the Virgin
and without [male] seed becoming man
has lavished on us his divinity.*⁴²

Christmas Vigil Celebration

The custom to begin certain solemnities (different in different ritual churches) with a Vigil. Among these solemnities Christmas is preeminent. This custom should be maintained and fostered, according to the particular usage of each Church.⁴³

Four Christmas Masses

The Mass of the Vigil of Christmas is used in the evening of 24 December, either before or after Evening Prayer I. A question was put to the Congregation for Divine Worship as to the character and timing of the Vigil Mass. *May the Mass of the vigil of Christmas be celebrated in the morning on 24 December? Reply: No. The Mass is the Mass of the weekday [December 24th]. The idea of a vigil has been completely altered; vigils in the former way of observance no longer exist. In the evening of the day preceding certain solemnities the vigil's proper Mass is celebrated as already part of the solemnity; thus it is a festive Mass: Notitiae 5 (1969) 405, no. 21.*

On Christmas Day itself, following an ancient tradition of Rome, three Masses may be celebrated: namely, the Mass at Midnight, the Mass at Dawn, and the Mass during the Day.

⁴⁰ *Ceremonial of Bishops* [hereafter, CB], no. 237. cf. Phil. 2:6-ff; *Order of Mass* \0preparation of the gifts, no. 24: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 525.

⁴² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 526.

⁴³ GILH, no. 71.

The Gregorian and Gelasian Sacramentaries give three Masses for this Feast. The first Mass [at midnight] was celebrated at the *Oratorium Præsepis* in St. Mary Major. The second Mass [at dawn] was celebrated by the pope in the “chapel royal” of the Byzantine Court officials on the Palatine hill, that is St. Anastasia’s church. The third Mass [during the day] was at the high altar of St. Mary Major.

A question was put to the Congregation for Divine Worship as to the timing of the Midnight Mass. *Query: May the Christmas Mass at Midnight be celebrated in the evening of the Christmas vigil?*
Reply: The Christmas Mass at Midnight must be celebrated around midnight so that the celebration is authentic as to time. For the evening Mass in fulfillment of the precept the text to be used is that for the vigil Mass, as indicated in the rubrics of the Missal (MR 153 [Roman Missal, Christmas, Vigil Mass]: “This Mass is celebrated during the afternoon of 24 December, whether before of after Evening Prayer I of Christmas”): *Notitiae* 10 (1974) 80, no. 1.

The Proclamation of the Birth of Christ

1. The *Roman Martyrology* for Christmas day contains a formal announcement of the birth of Christ in the style of a proclamation. It begins with creation and relates the birth of the Lord to the major events and personages of sacred and secular history. The particular events contained in the proclamation help to situate the birth of Jesus in the context of salvation history.
2. *The Proclamation of the Birth of Christ* may be sung or proclaimed after the greeting and introduction of the Christmas Midnight Mass. The *Gloria* and opening prayer immediately follow the proclamation.
3. The proclamation may also be sung or proclaimed at the Liturgy of the Hours. If it is used at Morning or Evening Prayer, it follows the introduction of the hour and precedes the hymn. When it is proclaimed during the Office of Readings, it precedes the *Te Deum*.
4. According to circumstances, the proclamation may be sung or recited at the ambo by a deacon, cantor, or reader.
5. After the greeting of the Mass, the celebrant or another minister may briefly introduce the Mass and the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ which follows, using these or similar words. Throughout the season of Advent, the Church has reflected on God’s promises, so often spoken by the prophets, to send a savior to the people of Israel who would be Emmanuel, that is, God with us. In the fullness of time those promises were fulfilled. With hearts full of joy let us listen to the proclamation of our Savior’s birth.
6. The text and musical notation can be found in the *Sacramentary Supplement* (2004 edition).

The Christmas Lectionary⁴⁴

For the vigil and the three Masses of Christmas both the prophetic readings and the others have been chosen from the Roman tradition.

⁴⁴ *LM*, nos. 95 - 96

Sundays & Feasts

The Gospel on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, Feast of the Holy Family, is about Jesus' childhood and the other readings are about the virtues of family life. On the Octave Day of Christmas, Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, the readings are about the Virgin Mother of God and the giving of the holy Name of Jesus. On the second Sunday after Christmas, the readings are about the mystery of the Incarnation. On the Epiphany of the Lord, the Old Testament reading and the Gospel continue the Roman tradition; the text for the reading from the Letters of the Apostles is about the calling of the nations to salvation. On the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the texts chosen are about this mystery.

Christmas Weekday Readings

From 29 December on, there is a continuous reading of the whole of the First Letter of John, which actually begins earlier, on 27 December, the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, and on 28 December, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The Gospels relate manifestations of the Lord: events of Jesus' childhood from the Gospel of Luke (29-30 December); passages from the first chapter of the Gospel of John (31 December-5 January); other manifestations of the Lord from the four Gospels (7-12 January).

Novena for the Immaculate Conception follows on next page.

Novena for the Immaculate Conception

November 30 through December 7

This novena is taken from the Handbook of Prayers edited by Reverend James Socias. Since the Immaculate Conception is the Patroness of the United States of America, it seems appropriate to include this very special novena. Pope Pius XI formally instituted the celebration of the Immaculate Conception when he proclaimed this dogma on December 8, 1854. Affirming the constant faith of the Church, he expressed in that definition the exact meaning of the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception: that she was conceived free from the stain of original sin. This feast has been celebrated in the East, and also in many places in the West, since the eighth century. This privilege of Mary is the most beautiful fruit of her Son's Redemption. Chosen as mother of the Savior, Mary received the benefits of salvation from the moment of her conception. Christ came to take away the sin of mankind; he did not allow it to contaminate Mary. The sanctity of our Blessed Mother is a model for all Christians. We seek her intercession that we may be rid of our sins and achieve sanctity.

First Day

(November 30)

Mary, the New Eve

Introductory Prayer

Lord God,
may our gifts be sanctified by the Holy Spirit,
who formed the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be a new creation
and sent down upon her
the dew of heavenly grace,
so that her womb might bear the fruits of our salvation, Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading: Genesis 3:1-6, 13-15

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that The LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Consideration

"Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, is placed *at the very center of that enmity*, that struggle, that accompanies the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. In this central place, she who belongs to the 'weak and poor of the Lord' bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that 'glory of grace' which the Father 'has bestowed on us in his Beloved Son,' and this *grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty* of her whole being. Mary thus remains before

God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in Paul's letter: 'in Christ...he chose us...before the foundation of the world,...he destined us...to be his sons' (Eph 1:4, 5). This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that 'enmity' that marks the history of man. In this history Mary remains a sign of sure hope" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 11).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Day

(December 1)

Mary, full of grace

Introductory Prayer

Lord God,
in your plan for our salvation
your Word became man,
announced by an angel
and born of the Virgin Mary.
May we who believe
that she is the Mother of God
receive the help of her prayers.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:26-33

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the LORD God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Consideration

"When we read that the messenger addresses Mary as 'full of grace,' the gospel context, which mingles revelations and ancient promises, enables us to understand that among all the 'spiritual blessings in Christ,' this is a special 'blessing.' In the mystery of Christ she is *present* even 'before the creation of the world,' as the one whom the Father 'has chosen' as *Mother* of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the

Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way, Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is *eternally loved in this 'beloved Son,'* this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the 'glory of grace.' At the same time, she is— and remains—perfectly open to this 'gift from above' (cf. Jas 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary 'stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him'" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 8).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your
Son by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THIRD DAY

(DECEMBER 2)

Mary, the handmaid of the Lord

Introductory Prayer

Lord God,
when your Son came down from heaven,
Mary had conceived him in her heart
before she conceived him in her womb:
grant that by holy and just deeds
we may show forth in our lives the Christ whom we have received by faith,
and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:34-38

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?"
And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Consideration

" Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the 'full submission of intellect and will,' manifesting 'the obedience of faith' to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, *with all her human and feminine 'I,'* and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with 'the grace of God that precedes and assists' and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who 'constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.' "The word of the living God, announced to Mary by the angel, referred to her: 'And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son' (Lk 1:31). By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the 'Mother of the Lord,' and the divine mystery of the In-carnation was to be accomplished in her: 'The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation.' And Mary

gives this consent after she has heard everything the messenger has to say.... The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her *fiat*: 'Let it be to me according to your word,' which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire." (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 13).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOURTH DAY

(DECEMBER 3)

Mary, blessed among women

Introductory Prayer

Lord, our God,
Savior of the human family, you brought salvation and joy
to the house of Elizabeth
through the visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
the Ark of the new Covenant. We ask that, in obedience
to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we too may bring Christ to others
and magnify your name by the praise of our lips and the holiness of our lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:39-44

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy."

Consideration

"Immediately after the narration of the Annunciation, the evangelist Luke guides us in the footsteps of the Virgin of Nazareth towards 'a city of Judah' (Lk 1:39). According to scholars, this city would be the modern Ain Karim, situated in the mountains, not far from Jerusalem. Mary arrived there 'in haste,' to visit Elizabeth her kinswoman... . "Moved by charity, therefore, Mary goes to the house of her kinswoman. When Mary enters, Elizabeth replies to her greeting and feels the child leap in her womb, and, being 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' she greets Mary with a loud cry: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' Elizabeth's exclamation or acclamation was subsequently to become part of the *Hail Mary*, as a continuation of the angel's greeting, thus becoming one of the Church's most frequently used prayers. But still more significant are the words of Elizabeth in the question that follows: 'And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to

me?’ (Lk 1:43). Elizabeth bears witness to Mary: she recognizes and proclaims that before her stands the mother of the Lord, the mother of the Messiah. The son whom Elizabeth is carrying in her womb also shares in this witness: ‘The babe in my womb leaped for joy’ (Lk 1:44). This child is the future John the Baptist, who at the Jordan will point out Jesus as the Messiah’ “ (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 12).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your
Son by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin
in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FIFTH DAY

(DECEMBER 4)

Mary, Model of Faith

Introductory Prayer

All-holy Father, eternal God,
in your goodness
you prepared a royal throne for your Wisdom
in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary;
bathe your Church in the radiance of your life-giving Word,
that it may press forward on its pilgrim way in the light of your truth,
and so come to the joy
of a perfect knowledge of your love. God of wisdom,
in your desire to restore us to your friendship after we had lost it by sin,
you chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the seat of your Wisdom.
Grant through her intercession
that we may seek not the folly of the wise but the loving service
that marks out the poor in spirit.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:45-56

[And Elizabeth exclaimed:]

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him, from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

Consideration

“Elizabeth’s words ‘And blessed is she who believed’ do not apply only to that particular moment of the Annunciation. Certainly the Annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary’s faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole ‘journey towards God’ begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner— indeed, with an ever-greater heroism of faith— the ‘obedience’ which she professes to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary’s ‘obedience of faith’ during the whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. Just like the Patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal *fiat*, ‘in hope believed against hope.’

“In the expression ‘Blessed is she who believed,’ we can therefore rightly find *a kind of key* that unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary, whom the angel hailed as ‘full of grace.’ If as ‘full of grace’ she has been eternally present in the mystery of Christ, through faith she became a sharer in that *mystery* in every extension of her earthly journey. She ‘advanced in her pilgrimage of faith,’ and at the same time, in a discreet yet direct and effective way, she made present to humanity *the mystery of Christ*. And she still continues to do so. Through the mystery of Christ, she too is present within mankind. Thus through the mystery of the Son the mystery of the Mother also is made clear” “ (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 14 & 19).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SIXTH DAY

(DECEMBER 5)

Mary, co-redemptrix

Introductory Prayer

Lord our God,
in your eternal wisdom
you fill out the passion of Christ
through the suffering that his members endure
in the many trials of this life.
As you gave his mother strength in her agony
to stand by the cross of your Son,
grant that we too may bring loving comfort to others
in their distress of mind or body.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Luke 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast pre-pared in the presence of all peoples, a light for rev-elation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Consideration

"A just and God-fearing man, called Simeon, appears at this beginning of Mary's 'journey' of faith. His words, suggested by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 2:25-27), confirm the truth of the Annunciation. For we read that he took up in his arms the Child to whom—in accordance with the angel's command—the name Jesus was given (cf. Lk 2:21). Simeon's words match the meaning of this name, which is Savior: 'God is salvation.' Turning to the Lord, he says: 'For my eyes have seen your *salvation*, which you have prepared *in the presence of all peoples*, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.' At the same time, however, Simeon addresses Mary with the following words: 'Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for *a sign that is spoken against*, that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed'; and he adds with direct reference to her: 'and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.' "Simeon's words cast new light on the announcement that Mary had heard from the angel: Jesus is the Savior, he is '*a light for revelation*' to mankind. Is not this what was manifested in a way on Christmas night, when the shepherds came to the stable (cf. Lk 2:8-20)? Is not this what was to be manifested even more clearly in the coming of the *Magi from the East* (Mt 2:1-12)? But at the same time, at the very beginning of his life, the Son of Mary, and his Mother with him, will experience in themselves the truth of those other words of Simeon: '*a sign that is spoken against*.' "Simeon's words seem like a *second Annunciation to Mary*, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow. While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 16).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin
in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SEVENTH DAY

(DECEMBER 6)

*Mary, the first of those
who heard the word of God and did it*

Introductory Prayer

Lord our God,
you sent your Son from heaven
into the womb of the Blessed Virgin
to be your saving word and our bread of life:
grant that like Mary we may welcome Christ,
by treasuring his words in our hearts
and celebrating in faith
the deep mysteries of our redemption.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Luke 11:27-28

As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But he said, "Blessed, rather, are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Consideration

"The gospel of Luke records the moment when 'a woman in the crowd raised her voice' and said to Jesus: 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!' (Lk 11:27). These words were an expression of praise of Mary as Jesus' mother according to the flesh... . "But to the blessing uttered by that woman upon her who was his mother according to the flesh, Jesus replies in a significant way: 'Blessed, rather, are those who hear the word of God and keep it' (Lk 11:28). He wishes to divert attention from motherhood understood only as a fleshly bond, in order to direct it towards those mysterious bonds of the spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word... . "Without any doubt, Mary is worthy of blessing by the very fact that she became the mother of Jesus according to the flesh ('Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked'), but also and especially because already at the Annunciation she accepted the word of God, because she believed it, *because she was obedient to God*, and because she 'kept' the word and 'pondered it in her heart' (cf. Lk 1:38, 45; 2:19, 51) and by means of her whole life accomplished it. Thus we can say that the blessing proclaimed by Jesus is not in opposition, despite appearances, to the blessing uttered by the unknown woman, but rather coincides with that blessing in the person of this Virgin Mother, who called herself only 'the

handmaid of the Lord' (Lk 1:38)... . "If *through faith* Mary became the bearer of the Son given to her by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, while preserving her virginity intact, in that same faith she *discovered and accepted the other dimension of motherhood* revealed by Jesus during his messianic mission. One can say that this dimension of motherhood belonged to Mary from the beginning, that is to say, from the moment of the conception and birth of her Son. From that time she was 'the one who believed.' . . . Thus *in a sense* Mary as mother became *the first 'disciple' of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say 'Follow me,' even before he addressed this call to the apostles or to anyone else (cf. Jn 1:43)" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 20).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin
in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession, may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

EIGHTH DAY

(DECEMBER 7)

Mary, mediatrix of all graces

Introductory Prayer

God of heaven and earth,
your Son, Jesus the Lord, while dying on the altar of the cross,
chose Mary, his mother, to be our mother also.
Grant that we, who entrust ourselves to her maternal care,
may always be protected when we call upon her name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Consideration

"Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the *Mother of Jesus*, and in a significant way she *contributes* to that 'beginning of the signs' which reveal the messianic power of her Son. We read: 'When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come"' (Jn 2: 3-4). In John's gospel that 'hour'

means the time appointed by the Father when the Son accomplishes his task and is to be glorified (cf. Jn 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). Even though Jesus' reply to his mother sounds like a refusal (especially if we consider the blunt statement 'My hour has not yet come,' rather than the question), Mary nevertheless turns to the servants and says to them: 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2:5). Then Jesus orders the servants to fill the stone jars with water, and the water becomes wine, better than the wine which has previously been served to the wedding guests "In this passage of John's gospel we find as it were a first manifestation of the truth concerning Mary's maternal care. This truth has also found expression *in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council*. ... 'Mary's maternal function towards mankind *in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its efficacy,*' because "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2:5)... The episode at Cana in Galilee offers us *a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation, wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.* "From the *text of John*, it is evident that it is a mediation that is maternal. As the Council proclaims: Mary became 'a mother to us in the order of grace.' This motherhood in the order of grace flows from her divine motherhood. Because she was, by the design of divine Providence, the mother who nourished the divine Redeemer, Mary became 'an associate of unique nobility, and the Lord's humble handmaid,' who 'co-operated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls.' And 'this *maternity of Mary in the order of grace . . . will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect*'" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 21 & 22).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin
in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession, may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

NINTH DAY

(DECEMBER 8)

Mary, Mother of God and our mother

Introductory Prayer

God of mercies,
your only Son, while hanging on the cross,
appointed Mary, his mother, to be our mother also.
Like her, and under her loving care, may your Church grow day by day,
rejoice in the holiness of its children,
and so attract to itself all the peoples of the earth.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: John 19:23-27

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did this.

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Consideration

"If John's description of the event at Cana presents Mary's caring motherhood at the beginning of Christ's messianic activity, another passage from the same gospel confirms this motherhood in the salvific economy of grace at its crowning moment, namely, when Christ's sacrifice on the cross, his paschal mystery, is accomplished. John's description is concise: '*Standing by the cross of Jesus* were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, he said to his mother: "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home' (Jn 19:25-27). "... And yet the 'testament of Christ's Cross' says more. Jesus highlights a new relationship between Mother and Son, the whole truth and reality of which he solemnly confirms. One can say that if Mary's motherhood of the human race had already been outlined, now it is clearly stated and established. It *emerges* from the definitive accomplishment of *the Redeemer's paschal mystery*. The mother of Christ, who stands at the very center of this mystery—a mystery that embraces each individual and all humanity—is given as mother to every single individual and all mankind" (John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 24).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
you prepared a worthy dwelling place for your Son
by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin;
grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from all stain of sin in your foreknowledge of his death,
so we, by her intercession,
may come to you with pure hearts.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.