

DECEMBER 19, 2021



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FOURTH
Sunday
OF *Advent*

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country
in haste to a town of Judah,
where she entered the house of
Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Luke 1:39-40

Audacity

There is a spirit of audacity in our readings today. During a time of injustice and threat of invasion, the prophet Micah boldly announces that the God of insignificant Israel will raise up a leader from backwater Bethlehem, and this leader will bring justice and peace to the whole world. In the Gospel, Elizabeth and Mary, marginalized women, brazenly celebrate that their sons will be world-changing instruments of God. We further learn that this audacity is rooted in trust in God. The author of Hebrews describes the faithful obedience of Jesus. Mary is shown as the exemplar of faithful trust in God. This is the way God often seems to work, in the ordinary and marginalized in our world. Those who seem weak have learned to trust in God's strength. These have the audacity to become instruments of God's peace and justice. Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday: Fourth Sunday of Advent
Tuesday: St. Peter Canisius; Winter begins
Thursday: St. John of Kanty
Friday: The Vigil of Christmas
Saturday: The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Readings for the Week

Monday: Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-6; Lk 1:26-38
Tuesday: Sg 2:8-14 or Zep 3:14-18a; Ps 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Lk 1:39-45
Wednesday: 1 Sm 1:24-28; 1 Sm 2:1, 4-8abcd; Lk 1:46-56
Thursday: Mal 3:1-4, 23-34; Ps 25:4-5ab, 8-10, 14; Lk 1:57-66
Friday: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Lk 1:67-79
Saturday: Vigil: Is 62:1-5; Ps 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Mt 1:1-25 [18-25]
Night: Is 9:1-6; Ps 96:1-3, 11-13; Ti 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14
Dawn: Is 62:11-12; Ps 97:1, 6, 11-12; Ti 3:4-7; Lk 2:15-20
Day: Is 52:7-10; Ps 98:1-6; Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1-18 [1-5, 9-14]
Sunday: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14 or 1 Sm 1:20-22, 24-28; Ps 128:1-5 or Ps 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10; Col 3:12-21 [12-17] or 1 Jn 3:1-2, 21-24; Lk 2:41-52

Today's Readings

First Reading — From Bethlehem-Ephrathah shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel (Micah 5:1-4a).

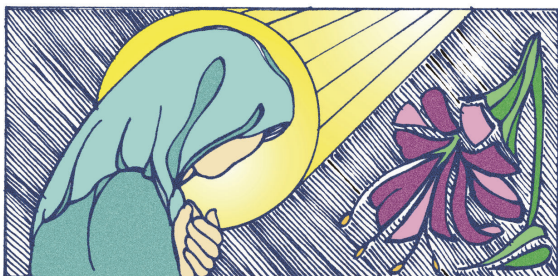
Psalm — Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved (Psalm 80).

Second Reading — We have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:5-10).

Gospel — Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken by the Lord would be fulfilled (Luke 1:39-45).
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Prayer Of The Week

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your
Son was made known by the message of an Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.



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Reflection question:

How can I make known to others the Incarnation of Christ?

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Treasures From Our Tradition

In ancient pagan Rome, these days in mid-December were a time for general slacking off at work and far too much rejoicing. The period of leisure after the harvest and a whole cluster of pagan festivals were a force for the church to reckon with. The Saturnalia, breaking out on December 17, was a time of high living and loose morals. Christians were advised by their bishops to drop out of the mayhem and do some serious fasting. A famous church council at Saragossa in Spain made a season of fasting mandatory from December 17 to December 23, exactly coinciding with the Saturnalia. The bishops at that time were perhaps less concerned with preparing for Christmas than with resisting the kind of loose living going on.

Modern times have restored a bit of the Saturnalia spirit to our culture, so that a general period of partying with a vague connection to religion is now upon us. How does a Christian keep balance? The practice of charity by remembering the poor in our gift-giving, of hospitality in finding a place at our holiday tables for the poor and lonely, and of daily prayer in the home and at church are great helps. Although Advent is not a penitential season like Lent, it is a time for making room in our lives for what matters most.

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Nature Restored

Christ is born, that by his birth he might restore your nature.

—St. Peter Chrysologus

O Little Town of Bethlehem

There is a Christmas song that says of Bethlehem: "Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light." Bethlehem is a suburb of Jerusalem. Its main tourist attraction in the time of Jesus was that it was the birthplace of David. Though today it has many modern homes and buildings, you can still see that it is part of "the hill country. . . of Judah." (Lk 1:39) It is not too far from En Kerem, where John the Baptist was born, and apparently where today's Gospel takes place.

We see in the Gospel reading today how Elizabeth and her unborn child rejoiced at the news of Jesus' coming birth. The story implies that Mary went to see Elizabeth as soon as the angel told her about Jesus. Maybe it was easier to tell her cousin, who was also with child, than her fiancé. I would think that talking about it made this miracle more real. I know that talking about my faith makes it more real to me.

Jesus is the "everlasting Light" mentioned in the song. That light shines today, not just in Bethlehem, but everywhere that his followers bring it. When we console someone who is mourning, that light shines. When we offer to help someone in need, it shines brighter. When we forgive someone who hurt us, the light is burning. When we offer to sponsor a candidate in the RCIA, the light grows. When we teach a child how to pray, it shines even brighter.

Our dark streets need the everlasting Light today as much as they did 2000 years ago. Today we remember how Mary and Elizabeth shared their faith in God. They did so much like we do today. Mary could not see her unborn son yet, but helped Elizabeth to believe by her words. Jesus, who seems to be invisible today, is seen in the shared faith of those who bring him into the world by their words and actions.

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Love Now

Let those love now
who never lov'd before;
let those who always lov'd
now love the more.

—Anonymous

God's Word for Children

God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus.
 One day Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth.
 Elizabeth was going to have a baby, too.
 The baby inside her leaped for joy when he heard Mary's voice!
 Look at these pictures.
 Circle five things that are in the bottom one but not the top.

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The prophet Micah wrote about the place where Jesus was born.
 He said "one who is to be the ruler in Israel"
 would come from this small village (Micah 5:1).
 Unscramble the letters in the windows
 to print the name of this place below.

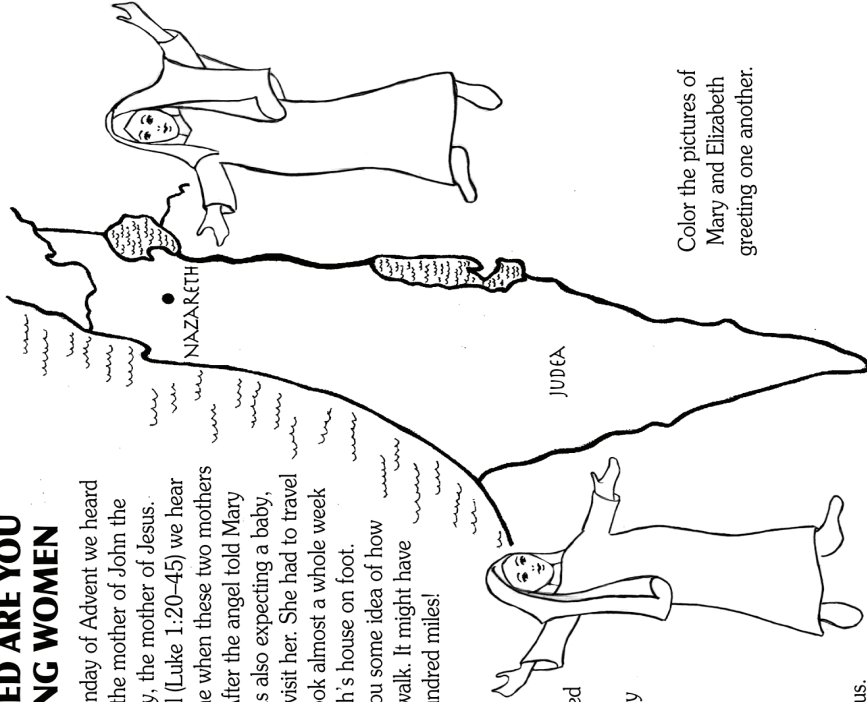
Fourth Sunday of Advent

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CATHOLIC CORNER

BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN

On the First Sunday of Advent we heard about Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. In today's Gospel (Luke 1:20-45) we hear the story of a time when these two mothers came together. After the angel told Mary that Elizabeth was also expecting a baby, Mary decided to visit her. She had to travel a long way—it took almost a whole week to get to Elizabeth's house on foot. The map gives you some idea of how far Mary had to walk. It might have been almost a hundred miles!

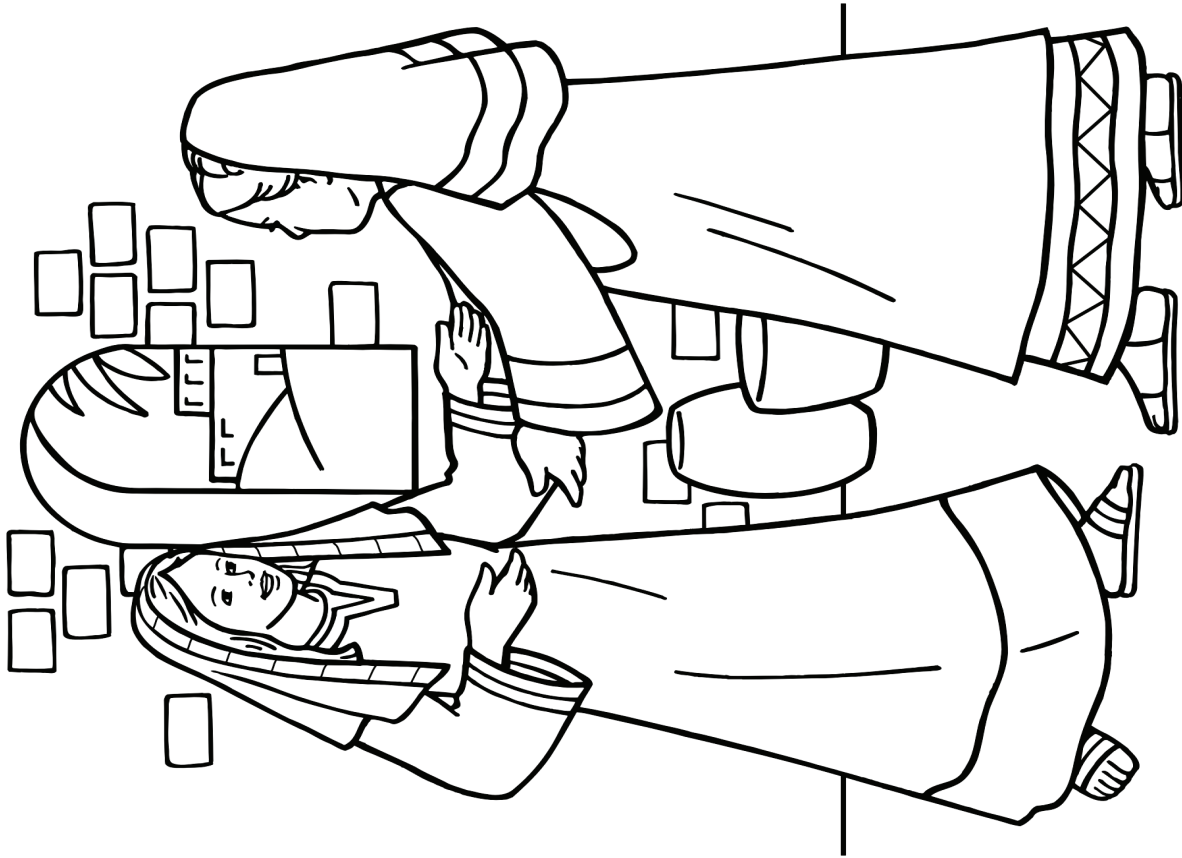


Color the pictures of Mary and Elizabeth greeting one another.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with words we still pray today in the Hail Mary: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth was talking about Jesus.

Before you go to sleep tonight, pray a Hail Mary. Think about how excited Mary and Elizabeth were when they thought about their babies soon to be born.

In two days we will celebrate that great event when God came to us as Jesus and was born as one of us.



[Mary] entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Luke 1:40



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INCARNATION AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

For years, Catholic spiritual writers have drawn our attention to the Christmas liturgy's subtle—and not-so-subtle—linking of Christ's incarnation with his paschal mystery. In the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, there are countless intimations of the Passion and cross. The saints of the Christmas octave, dubbed “comites Christi,” Christ's companions in suffering, form a royal honor guard of martyrs and others who bore witness at great personal sacrifice to the Child we hail as “Prince of Peace,” while the wood of the manger evokes the wood of the cross. But these days, sadly, in the wake of seemingly endless mass shootings at schools, we need no reminders of how close in real life are the cradle and the cross. May our hearts find, if not answers, at least comfort in the prophet Micah's reminder that, from the pain of a woman's labor came forth the Child who is our incarnate peace.

COMFORT AND SALVATION

All of today's scriptures seem to declare Christmas's “comfort and joy.” Micah declares that, as small as Bethlehem is, the child born there will bring peace that “shall reach to the ends of the earth.” Hebrews proclaims that, despite pain and suffering, the “offering of the body of Jesus Christ” saves us all. In today's Gospel, bearing the Christ Child within her, Mary, barely more than a child herself, immediately, unselfishly sets aside her own preoccupations—and as a betrothed but as yet unmarried mother-to-be, how many they must have been—to travel in haste, over dangerous terrain, a four-day journey (the scholars say) from Nazareth to Ain-Karem, to the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

BLESSED

Then, just as David leapt and danced before the ancient Ark of the Covenant that bore precious signs of God's abiding presence, so John leaps in his mother Elizabeth's womb as Mary arrives, a living ark bearing God's living presence. Elizabeth joyfully greets Mary in words that we pray daily in the “Hail Mary”: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Why Mary is so “blessed” Elizabeth then explains: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Likewise, we may dare hope to be “blessed” for “believing that what was spoken” to us “by the Lord”—Jesus' promise of mercy—will be fulfilled as we share God's mercy with everyone. For by reason of our baptism and, more immediately and repeatedly, because of our participation in the Eucharist, we too bear within ourselves the living Christ. To whom, or to what situation, do we need to bear Christ this Christmas? Indeed, throughout the year, how selflessly do we set our own concerns aside? How eagerly—“in haste”—do we, disregarding difficulties, traverse whatever dangerous terrain needs conquering to be of service to another?

TODAY'S READINGS

Micah 5:1–4a
Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19
Hebrews 10:5–10
Luke 1:39–45

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