



Impact

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.

December, 2019

In the month of December, we will celebrate the entirety of the Advent season, Christmas eve and day, and the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. December is always busy for pastors, parish leaders, and their people. Since this month includes two seasons, this issue of Impact features reflections on Advent and Christmas with the hope that this resource may provide encouragement for your people to celebrate “the reason for the season.” I will hold you in prayer as you help your people celebrate God’s great love for us in Jesus Christ. May you be filled with great joy! - Leisa Anslinger

Homily Connections

December 1: We hear in today’s first reading that we are called to “walk in the light of the Lord.” Throughout the season of Advent, we are given compelling images of God’s vision for the world. We who are joined with Christ through baptism are called to bring God’s love to the world.

Connecting with everyday life: Where is God’s love needed in your parish or local area? What in our world compels us to reach out with Christ’s presence? John’s strong words to the Pharisees and Sadducees should be a wake-up call for us. As Christian disciples, we must produce good fruit. This Advent season is a perfect time to encourage our people to think beyond their families and friends as they anticipate sharing their presence, hospitality, gifts, and food, and to consider all who are in need. (Page 1)

December 8: “Be strong, fear not! Here is your God... then the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.” (First reading) What fears hold us back from living our faith? What miracles would be possible if we put fear aside?

Connecting with everyday life: In this Advent season, and throughout the year, we encourage people to take to heart God’s loving presence within and around them. Today, we may tackle the greatest obstacle to living faith in daily life: fear. Living faith in daily life as a disciple who is committed to steward his or her gifts well often feels risky — we must rely on God’s providence and presence in order to make Christ’s presence known to those who are blind or deaf to the message of the Gospel, those who are paralyzed by their life circumstances, those who fear rejection in living or sharing their faith. When we take the message of Isaiah to heart today, we realize that we can put fear aside, and that doing so will enable God to work through us.

December 15: “Go and tell others what you hear and see.” Jesus’ response to John’s disciples are strong words for us as well. We are called to witness to the healing, merciful, astounding love of God, poured out for us through Jesus Christ. And, through our stewardship of our many gifts, we participate in this love, poured out for others through our caring and sharing.

Connecting with everyday life: Even though December often includes opportunities for charitable giving and service, many people are tempted to “opt out” because they are so busy with preparations for Christmas and participation in pre-Christmas gatherings and events. Today is a perfect time to invite your people to pause and take to heart Christ’s call to witness to God’s love through our words and deeds. (Page 1)

December 22: God is with us! As we anticipate the celebration of Christmas, we begin to prepare to hear the incredible news of the Incarnation. It is remarkable to consider the tremendous love of God for us. In telling again Mary and Joseph’s assent to their role in salvation history, we ask ourselves what our role is in carrying out our mission. We do so by stewarding our gifts and talents, faith, prayer, and resources well.

Connecting with everyday life: December is filled with activity, the search for just the right gifts, and preparation for family gatherings, travel and meals. Our readings today invite us to pause and consider what we will celebrate in the days to come. In today's gospel, we hear of Joseph's decision to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by taking Mary into his home as his wife. Joseph's dramatic story invites us to ask ourselves: what "yes" are we being asked to say? (Page 2)

December 29: On this Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, multiple reading options provide a rich banquet of wisdom from which to draw. Read through the lens of today's feast, the readings offer insight into the vision of relationships within families that are centered on God and God's ways, in which members more fully respond to the call to holiness with one another.

Connecting with everyday life: The gospel passage is one of the most familiar to many of our people, and often perplexes hearers as well as consoles parents, who take heart that Mary and Joseph can relate to the ups and downs of family life. Recall a story from your own life in family or that of someone you know to lead your people to consider how they may find strength, encouragement, and inspiration from the holy family, and see holiness potential in their family, however broken, busy, or complex it might be.

At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God, you draw all people
to yourself through your son, Jesus Christ
who came to show us your love in human form.

Show us your holy path, as we carry your love to the world.

Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we strive to live
as good stewards of your love throughout the circumstances of our daily lives.

We ask this in the name of the One who has come
and will come again,
Jesus Christ, who is one with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Listen to Sacred Scripture: Mt 1:18-24

Read: Select the article that fits the point in the month in which the meeting takes place.

Share: your thoughts, using these questions to guide your reflection:

In what ways do the Advent and Christmas seasons invite you to be attentive to God's grace and expectant in the hope of God's love?

What is Christmas all about for you?

Commit: Set aside a few moments each day to prayerfully remind yourself of the reason for this sacred season. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer and action.

Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

THE WORLD WAITS.

Only the love of God can change hearts and lives.

IN ADVENT, WE WAIT.

God wants so profoundly to be with us, to be near to us, that God came to be among us as a little child, Jesus. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. Advent is the season that helps us to prepare to take this amazing news to heart. It is not as though we pretend that Jesus has not already come. It is more that taking time each year to ponder this great mystery helps us to follow Jesus more nearly with our lives. Is there ever a time in which we do not need God's mercy and peace, love and hope?

GOD'S LOVE IS A LIFE-CHANGER AND A WORLD-CHANGER

Listen closely to the readings this Advent. They're filled with images of a future in which God's love reigns, in which there is no war or injustice, separation or fear, in which all is as God created it to be. Our lives and the world can be changed through the power of God's love.

WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR NEED FOR GOD

We cannot be passive recipients of the incredible love of God which is shown to and shared with us in Jesus. We only need to read or watch the news, talk to friends, or log onto social media to recognize how much God's love is needed at this time. The season of Advent invites us to ask ourselves how we are called to bring the love of the Lord into a waiting world.

WHILE WE WAIT, WE CELEBRATE

In being one with us, Jesus helps us to appreciate the sacred potential each of us has. When asked by the disciples of John the Baptist if he is the one who is to come (the Messiah), his reply is clear: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." (Mt 11:2-11) As members of Christ's body, we are called to touch others in powerful ways, to bring sight, healing, and care by our actions and words, our sharing and sacrifice. Through such stewardship, we walk in and share the light of the Lord. ©Catholic Life and Faith, 2019

Impact this month

Bring the season to life throughout this holy month.

- Place an Advent wreath in a prominent place in your home
- Reach out to someone who needs hope this month, even if it makes you uncomfortable to do so
- Say a simple prayer, such as "Jesus, come to us" before meals, shopping, or social time
- Save one night each week for quiet time at home
- Share with a friend or family member your favorite Christmas traditions and their meaning
- Include religious articles in your decorations
- Share the light of Christ with family and friends through your words and actions

Jesus, come to us.

Great joy! Christ is born.

What Christmas is all About

“Lights, please.” We can picture the scene in our mind’s eye: Linus moves to the center of the stage and recites the story from memory, ending simply with “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” The passage Linus recounts in “A Charlie Brown Christmas” is from the Gospel of Luke. We hear it each year at Christmas Mass during the night (often, later evening or midnight Mass).

What *is* Christmas all about?

Christmas is about God’s love for us. Jesus comes to be one with us, embracing humanity as we are. The incarnation shows us that we do not have to hide our thoughts, feelings, questions, and struggles. God is with us in all times and seasons of our lives.

Christmas is about God’s mercy. Jesus’ very name means “God saves.” In Christ, we know that no sin is beyond forgiveness, no action is beyond redemption.

Christmas is about God’s compassion. The birth of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem shows us the depths of Christ’s oneness with the poor and vulnerable. “Bethlehem” means “house of bread.” From the very moment of Jesus’ birth, we are shown that he is the Bread of Life, for all.

Christmas helps us to take to heart the truth that God’s love is real. When we see and experience love, we know God. When our hearts long for peace, kindness and goodwill among people, look to Christ, whose light shines in darkness.

Christmas calls us to be for others. As people who know God’s saving love, how can we not share this love with those who need it? When we care for family, share our time in service, our attention and prayer with the lonely or ill, our resources with the poor, we are sharing the real meaning of Christmas, no matter the time of year.

Christmas is more than a day or a season. Christmas is about a way of life. Knowing the depths of God’s love for us in this Christmas time, we stretch ourselves to live as Christ’s people, every day.

What is Christmas all about for you?

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This article previously appeared in the January, 2017 issue of Impact

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PRAY.

Consider the simple gift of YOU – who needs your attention? Be it a family member, a friend, a neighbor, or that person tugging on your heartstrings, present the gift of YOU.

SERVE.

Who could benefit from your unique gifts? What resources do you have to give? What is your generous response to all the gifts you have been given?

SHARE.

We don't have to put on special glasses or search far and wide to find the meaning of the season, just answer the call of our baptism to live as a steward and pray, serve, and share.