

*The
Wondrous
Gift
is Given*



Advent 2023


CENTURY OF SERVICE
THE
MADELEINE
PARISH & SCHOOL

O Wondrous Gift

Advent 2023 theme song

Words by Marilyn Robb

“O Wondrous GIFT”

*O wondrous gift, O promised child,
with joy we hear your story.*

*Refresh our souls,
and help us wait,
for your return in glory.*

*O wondrous gift, O precious child,
in humble manger sleeping.*

*In you is hope.
In you is love.*

God’s promise to us keeping.

*O wondrous gift, God’s only Son,
to earth you came to save us.*

*Upon the cross
you hung and died,
Eternal life you gave us.*

*O wondrous gift, O Holy Child,
abide with us forever.*

*With in our hearts
take up your home,
and we shall leave you never.*

Dear Madeleine family and friends,

Once again, we find ourselves searching for light as we journey through these dark days of Advent. The light comes to us in the “Wondrous Gift” of God’s beloved Son, sent to live among us, teach us how to love, and give us the everlasting gift of eternal life.

May your Advent days be brighter as you read these daily reflections. Once again, we have a variety of writers from Madeleine school children to retired priests. Each one has opened their hearts with a message to share.

The Sunday meditations are written in a faith sharing format and can be shared with a group or read and thought about privately.

Thank you to each of you who have shared your faith on these pages. Thank you to the production staff who brought this booklet to life, and a special thank you to Hugh Hammons, whose creative and artistic work, once again, brings our theme to life. Finally, thank you Fr. Bonaventure for being our spiritual guide.

The “Wondrous Gift” has been given.

All you need to do is open your heart and accept it.

—Marilyn Robb

Sunday, November 27

First Week of Advent: We Wait Again for the Gift

Last summer, dear friends invited me to spend some time with them at their home in Billings, Montana. As I was preparing to leave, I asked my son if he would take care of things around my place while I was gone. The plants needed to be watered, the mail picked up and the garbage and recycling containers taken out to the curb. He said he would be happy to do that for me.

After an enjoyable visit with dear friends, I returned home to find my yard and flowers looking great, and my mail neatly stacked on the kitchen counter. My surprise came when I opened my garage door and discovered that my son, whom I had left in charge of my property, had not only done what he had been asked to do, but had also cleaned and organized my garage.

In Sunday's Gospel, Mark tells us about the master who leaves home and places his servants in charge of his property, each with his own work to do.

Share: *When have you, or someone you know, done more than you or they were asked to do?*

† **Scripture: Read Mark 13:33-37**

Share: *What do you hear Jesus saying to you when you read these words?*

Commentary

In Sunday's Gospel, we hear Jesus telling his disciples about what is soon going to happen to them. He speaks about a master who leaves his home and places his servants in charge. Each servant is given a special task to do. Do the disciples realize that he is speaking specifically to them? He is the master who will soon leave them alone in this world to continue the work he has begun. After three wonderful and amazing years together, Jesus is telling them it was over, and they were on their own.

Share: *Share about a time when you felt very close to God, and a time when you thought God had abandoned you.*

Reflection:

We begin Advent knowing what is in the “Wondrous Gift” we have been given. It was the gift of God’s Son, who came to earth and became one of us to get closer to us and show us how to live a life full of love. He died for our sins, overcame death, and returned to his Father in Heaven. Now we wait and hear the words he spoke to his disciples being spoken to us: “There is work for you to do while you wait for my return.”

Share: *What could that work be?*

Prayer: Speak to us Lord and open our ears and hearts to what you are saying. Amen.

Monday, December 4

Gift of Healing

† **Psalm 147:3**—*Heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds.*

This wondrous gift of healing described in this Psalm, has been given to me, just as it has to so many of us. The Lord has healed me, the brokenhearted one, and bound up my wounds. And he has done it again and again throughout my life. He has turned circumstances to his good purpose. He has made a way. He has used other people, some Catholic, some not so Catholic, to speak truth and grace and kindness to me when I was miserable and thought myself unworthy of love. Too broken to be restored. What else can I do then, while I wait for my Savior, but allow myself to be his tool? I must try to imitate the example he has set for me so clearly. To be that kind hand when there is no other. To step into that inky darkness and be the light for another.

“I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, only more love.” —Saint Teresa of Calcutta

—AMY PITZER DE WITT

Lord, help me to heal others through your love. Amen.

Tuesday, December 5

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

† **Psalm 72:13**—*Show pity to the needy and poor.*

The season of Advent is now upon us. What an ideal time to reflect on our many blessings and do what we can to share our gifts with those in need. In these difficult times throughout our world, our city and our neighborhood, there are many opportunities to live like Christ and help those less fortunate than ourselves.

We need not look further than our parish for ways in which we can give. There is the food drive for St. Vincent de Paul, the Sleep in Heavenly Peace bedding drive, and the Knights of Columbus and Madeleine School annual sock drive, to name a few. Volunteering your time is also a valuable donation to these or an organization of your choice.

Jesus calls on us to “love your neighbor as yourself.” As we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child during this Advent season of self-sacrifice, let us put these words of the gospel into action and give as generously as possible of our time and treasure.

—MARY BETH O’DONNELL

Lord, help me to live with a generous heart. Amen.

Finding a Way to Peace

† **1Thess. 5:13b**—*Be at peace with each other.*

Today is the feast day of St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas was generous and kind-hearted. He gave away all of his inherited wealth and traveled the countryside helping the poor and sick.

Today's verse is "Be at peace with each other." St. Nicholas was probably at peace when he was helping others. We can be at peace with each other when we choose to help others instead of hurting others. We can choose to be kind and considerate.

When I think of being at peace with each other, I think of when my sister and I have a disagreement (which is often). We find a way for both of us to be happy. How can you find ways in your everyday life to be at peace with others?

—ABIGAIL HORTON, STUDENT, THE MADELEINE SCHOOL

Guide me Lord, in the way of peace. Amen.

Thursday, December 7

Beacons of Hope

† **1 Thess. 5:15**—*Seek what is good.*

This verse calls us to reflect on our actions during this Advent season, urging us to embrace the spirit of Christ's coming in a profound way. It reminds us to resist the impulse for revenge and instead to respond to harm with kindness and understanding. As we eagerly await the birth of Jesus, we must let go of anger and resentment.

We are called to live out the meaning of Advent by fostering a spirit of reconciliation, healing, and compassion. Rather than perpetuating a cycle of hurt and retaliation, let us choose the path of forgiveness and empathy. In this season of anticipation, we are called to extend kindness not only to those close to us but to all humanity.

As we light the Advent candles, let each flicker remind us of the growing light of Christ's presence in our hearts and in the world. By heeding the wisdom of Paul, we can become beacons of hope, radiating love and goodwill to all. This Advent, may we remember that the greatest gift we can offer is to mirror God's love and grace to every person we encounter.

—TRESA RAST, PRINCIPAL, THE MADELEINE SCHOOL

Lord, help us to be beacons of hope in this dark world. Amen.

Pray, Hope, Wait

† **1 Thess. 5: 16-18**—*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in all circumstances give thanks.*

It's not hard to imagine the longing a married couple has when fertility issues prevent them from conceiving a child. To pray and hope and wait. Let us imagine Anne and Joachim going to the Temple for the Feast of Tabernacles to say a long prayer and vow to the Lord, offering their child should they conceive from Anne's barren womb. They submit their prayers and offerings to the Lord. Anne dreams of the grace of childbirth to come through her continued prayers and lo, she conceives in her old age! What rejoicing occurs!

They name the child Mary which means star and pearl and light and peace but also bitterness, yet knowing she belongs to God before she existed. The vessel that has been conceived without Original Sin will bring forth our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! The wondrous gift is given! The prayers of thanksgiving Mary's parents submitted to heaven must have been joyful and unceasing indeed! Their example of waiting with hope and prayer should be our model for Advent.

—DONNA WUJEK

We rejoice, Lord, and give thanks with hope in our hearts, Amen.

Saturday, December 9

The Gift of Waiting

† **Psalm 130:5**—*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope.*

Whether it's for the light to turn green, for a human voice to come on the line, or for the next cashier...waiting can seem to take forever. But what if we knew this traffic light was our last, or this was our last phone call, or our last trip to the grocery store?

Knowing this, I'd want time to pass very slowly and suddenly every detail would become important. As the seconds ticked, my heart would begin to yearn for another light, or more hold music, or even a longer line!

How many more Advent Seasons will God give me? It won't be enough. My soul is happy to wait and rest in hope. Just a little longer. There is so much Divine love for us to see and experience.

—DEACON MIKE O'MAHONEY

Give me patience Lord, as I wait in your time. Amen.

Second Week of Advent: Attributes of the Wondrous Gift

If someone asks me about my younger cousin Becky, I respond as John the Baptist responded about his younger cousin Jesus: “There is one coming after me who is mightier than I.”

Becky is amazing. As a little kid, she would twirl her baton while riding a unicycle in the Labor Day parade. She could sing. She could dance and when she grew older, she became an accomplished organist. Her happy, outgoing personality causes everyone to like her. After graduating from college, she soared into the business world where she is still in demand as a consultant...even today, as she attempts to retire.

By the standards of today, she is “mighty.” But what really makes her “mighty” is her lifelong, steadfast relationship with her Creator and Lord. This is evident in how she lives her life. She brings light into this dark world. Her laugh is contagious as she goes through each day spreading joy and generously sharing everything she has with the people in her life and those who are not in her life.

Share: *Name a person you know, whom you would consider “mighty.” What is it about that person that makes them “mighty”?*

† **Scripture: Read Mark 1:1-8**

Share: *Describe John the Baptist. How could he be considered “mighty”?*

Commentary

John the Baptist embodies the characteristics of a true disciple. According to Mark, he gave everything he had to herald the coming of God's Kingdom and the need for people to respond by changing their lives. People came from all over the region to hear John preach, have their sins forgiven and be baptized. He was popular and very successful. He was "mighty" by just doing what he was sent to do. As the apostle John said about him: "He was able to decrease, so the Lord, himself could increase."

Share: *Give examples of how humble behavior can make others feel good or even "mighty." Give an example of someone you know who has the gift do this.*

Reflection

How did John the Baptist know Jesus? Was he referring to the words from the prophet Isaiah who describes this "wondrous gift" as a "Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever and Prince of Peace, whose dominion would be vast and forever peaceful"? Certainly, these words from Isaiah would describe a mighty person. How do we live our lives to show honor and respect to our Lord and Savior? Do we set aside one day a week to celebrate the Sabbath? Do we show honor by honoring the gifts we have been given including this planet we call home? Do we honor God by honoring ourselves and the people of this earth who are created in God's image?

Share: *How do you show honor?*

Prayer: Lord, help us to live with humility, so we may decrease, and others may increase. Amen.

What is a Wonderful Counselor?

† **Isaiah 9:5**—*His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor...*

Who are they talking about? Is it God the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit? Is it all three? What is a counselor, and what makes them wonderful?

Many of us have sought counsel in our life. It probably started with a parent. Perhaps later in life we may have used a professional counselor.

In most cases we trusted that they would care for us. Sometimes we only needed a sounding board off which to bounce our feelings. At other times we might have sought advice.

No matter what we needed, a wonderful counselor would always love and care for us. God is that wonderful counselor and he gave the gift of his Son who loves and cares for us no matter what we tell him.

—DAN EVANS

Let us never forget Lord, that you are always waiting to be our counselor. Amen.

Tuesday, December 12

Embrace Humility

† **Isaiah 9:5**—*His name shall be called...Mighty God...*

John the Baptist serves as the gatekeeper to the gospel, bridging the Old and New Testaments. His central message is a call to repentance, with humility as its foundational requirement. True repentance entails moving away from self-satisfaction and unshakable self-assuredness, as Jesus cautioned: “Do not say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’” (Matthew 3:9). Pride can breed complacency, obscuring the need for repentance.

John humbly acknowledges this. When asked about himself, he replied, “I am a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord. One greater than I will follow, whose sandals I’m not worthy to carry.” Humility is crucial during Advent because it opens the door to God. The Bible teaches: those who exalt themselves are humbled, and the humbled are exalted.

St. Gregory noted, “Pride is the sure sign of one cast out by God.” Lucifer’s pride led to his fall, while Adam and Eve’s desire for equality with God brought suffering and death. In contrast, Mary’s humility led to her exalted role as the mother of the Savior.

Just as a bag must be empty to hold something, the soul must empty itself of pride to make room for God. A pride-filled soul leaves no space for God. Embrace humility to welcome God into your heart.

—MY SCHONING

Forgive my pride Lord, and teach me humility. Amen.

Wednesday, December 13

Come, Let Us Adore Him

† **Isaiah 9:5**—*His name shall be called...Everlasting Father...*

By the power of God, a child comes into the world. Among the titles bestowed upon him are Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

This is the promised Messiah. We have been blessed by his presence, though it took place over 2000 years ago. Our faith recognizes this each year with the celebration of Christmas. Come let us adore him.

—BILL AND RUTH WIEBER

*Thank you Lord, for keeping your promise.
May we forever adore your Son. Amen.*

Thursday, December 14

The Prince in Our Midst

† **Isaiah 9:5**—*His name shall be called...Prince of Peace.*

Who exactly is the Prince of Peace? In the world we live in among the wars and riots (not only worldwide but in our cities), it is hard to discern peace, let alone a Prince of Peace! How are we to discover this Prince? Well, he is in our midst. There is nothing God wishes more for us than to come to know him in love, mercy, forgiveness and peace. I guess that makes him the “Prince of Peace.” In order to accomplish this, all he asks of us is to obey his Commandments!

Besides the 10 Commandments, there is prayer! Taking time in silence to close our minds to the world and to talk daily to God in the way we would talk to a best friend! The way we conduct our Spiritual life in quiet and by example will be passed down to our children and grandchildren or neighbors!! Who do we hope to be the Catholics of the future? Are we doing our part to show the importance of a spiritual life? Life is not simple but can radiate through our trust in God the “Prince of Peace”!

—MARILYN FAHERTY

*Lord, may we always remember
that you are the one who brings us peace. Amen.*

Thursday, December 15

Signs of Hope

† **Daniel 7:14**—*He received dominion, splendor, and kingship; all nations, peoples and tongues will serve him.*

Is this for real or a pipedream? Daniel, the prophet, is a man of visions writing in symbolic language to a people under persecution. Read in the gray sky and wet days of late fall, Daniel's message seems over the top in its promise of a splendid ruler who will be honored by people everywhere. The people Daniel was addressing must have been desperate for any sign of hope. Wars raging around us, our earth home in crisis, our city disfigured with litter and vandalism, we too grasp for signs of hope. Can we really believe that the God we long for has already come and remains with us? We don't need lots of faith, just enough to take the next step in today's journey and to share with those in our lives today.

—JOAN SPIERING, RGS

Journey with us Lord, for you are our hope. Amen.

Come Prince of Peace!

† **Micah 5:3**—*They shall dwell securely, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace.*

Lately, it seems like the entire world is at war—physically speaking, and in the divisional attitudes driving wedges within our individual hearts. The atrocities of war are unimaginable and terrifying. Our security in the world is constantly in question. We are anxious. Who can we trust and where is the peace that Micah speaks of? When the long-awaited Messiah (or Prince of Peace) came to dwell among us in the form of an infant, we failed to recognize him. This lack of recognition continued all the way to the cross, until the centurion declared “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). What did he see and experience that prompted this prophetic declaration? In our violent and troubled world, how will we recognize the Prince of Peace among us and invoke his divine power to change hearts? When it is difficult, how will we learn to truly live according to the second greatest commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31)? Peace begins in our hearts.

—DARLENE MAURER

*Prince of Peace, come and heal our
hardened and broken hearts. Amen.*

Sunday, December 17

Third Week of Advent: The Wondrous Gift is Revealed

There was snow in the forecast,
but the message had gone unheeded,
by the branches filled with blossoms
in the old church yard.

It was here,
on that cold February morning,
that I met Jesus.

His skin was the color of polished mahogany.
His heart, like that of burnished gold.
He steadied himself with a brightly painted cane,
as he unfolded the well-used bags
and filled them with food...

food to satisfy the hungry, the hurting, the sad.
He steadied himself with the joy of living,
as he unfolded his generous love
and filled the world with light and hope.

There was snow in the forecast,
but the message had gone unheeded,
by the branches filled with blossoms
in the old church yard.

Share: *Where have you seen Jesus?*

† **Scripture: Read John 1:6-8, 19-18**

Share: *Who are you and how is your identity connected to your relationship with Jesus Christ?*

Commentary

On this third week of Advent, John's popularity is growing, and the Jewish leaders are seeing him as a possible threat. They question his identity and the identity of the person about whom he is preaching. He tells them that this promised Messiah is possibly among them right now and they do not recognize him. As a matter of fact, they may never recognize him, because he was not going to be the powerful leader they were expecting. John himself, who grew up with Jesus as his cousin, did not recognize him until his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him, and a voice was heard saying: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Share: *How do you think Jesus makes his presence known in the world today?*

Reflection

John the Baptist's purpose was known at his conception. His story was even written down and recorded. What is your purpose here on earth? During this third week of Advent, take some time to think about the life you have been living. Can you think of a time when you felt you had a purpose and perhaps God was using you? As you move into the Christmas season and into a new year, be aware of how God is using you to be light, hope, love and joy in this world.

Share: *Can you think of a time when God used you?*

Prayer: Lord, may we always recognize you and fulfill the purpose you have planned for us. Amen.

Monday, December 18

Emmanuel: God is With Us

† **Zephaniah 3:17**—*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

In today's gospel we hear the story of how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. Joseph, betrothed to Mary, finds out that she is with child before they lived together. We can imagine the confusion and anxiety he must have felt. How could this be? And then an angel appears to Joseph and reassures him that he does not need to fear. It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived. The name of this child will be Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Years before the birth of Jesus, in the words of Zephaniah, we hear "God will quiet you by God's own Love." Is this not what happened for Joseph?

I invite you to reflect on the fears and anxieties you hold. Then pray to St. Joseph and ask him to help you remember that God wishes to quiet you by God's own love.

—THERESE FENZL

*Lord, quiet us as you did your servant Joseph.
Surround us with your love and be with us. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 19

Humble Occurrences

† **John 1:10**—*He was in the world and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.*

As we enter the holy Season of Advent, the words of John 1:10 resonate with profound relevance. Reflecting on these words, we are reminded of the timeless truth that despite Christ's pivotal role in the creation of the world, humanity, at times fails to recognize his presence among us. In the busyness of our lives, the noise of material pursuits, and the distractions of daily challenges, we often overlook the subtle yet transformative ways in which God manifests his love and grace in our lives.

Consider the humble occurrences that often pass unnoticed during this season of anticipation. The quiet acts of kindness from a stranger, the comforting words of a loved one in times of distress, or the solace found in the embrace of a compassionate community. These are some instances where Christ's presence is subtly revealed, yet we may fail to acknowledge his hand at work. Like the world in John 1:10, we can overlook the divine presence within our midst, in the rush of our daily lives.

This Advent, let us strive to open our hearts and minds to the profound beauty of God's presence in our lives. Through mindful contemplation, prayerful reflection, and compassionate action, may we deepen our awareness of the enduring love and light that emanate from the source of all creation.

—FR. ANTHONY AHAMEFULE

I open my heart, Lord, to the beauty of your presence. Amen.

Wednesday, December 20

Our Faith Restored

† **John 1:32, 34**—*John testified further saying, 'I saw the Spirit come down and remain upon him. Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.'*

We have both been blessed to live long lives, now in our 80s.

Regrettably, we strayed from the Church for many years, returning with forgiveness and a warm welcome from Father Mike. He also helped us become contributing members of our parish.

Thankfully our fellow parishioners gathered us in their collective arms, never judging us but always offering their friendship and support. They encouraged us to be of service to others, and hopefully show that age is not a barrier to an active parish life.

As we reflect on our good fortune to find our way back to our faith, we realize that the Spirit has come down and remains with us always. Truly, we have felt the presence of Jesus in our very souls!

We are in awe that the Son of God has restored our faith, and will remain with us until we draw our last breaths. We then look forward to a peaceful, eternal rest in the glory of God's presence.

— DAN & ANN LAGRANDE

Thank you Lord, for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thursday, December 21

Keep an Empty Bucket

† **Matt. 11:19**—*The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, ‘Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’*

Judgment is a bucket into which messy problems are tossed. Some we can't reconcile to our present circumstance; maybe others are so difficult we don't wish to resolve them. The bucket offers a simple solution: people make bad choices, so I don't have to seriously consider them. Jesus eats with sinners, the Pharisees declared, so you shouldn't seriously consider him.

But what's received, besides distance and a life isolated by personal interest? Don't we deny ourselves the gift of love, as Christ has loved, in service to hope, to compassion, or to exercise mercy? And avoiding love, don't we also deny our neighbor the same gift?

The other day, my mother asked, “Do you think homeless people choose to live that way?”

“Some, perhaps,” I replied. Then for the next few minutes, we pondered homeless people hindered by illness, injury, or misfortune, who are unable to hold a job. We talked about people who work but can't earn enough money to afford rent and so live on the street.

My mother looked quietly into the distance. Though her eyes are dimmed by old age, behind them I could see her mind working, working. The bucket sat empty.

—DAN O'BRIEN

Jesus, you loved everyone. Help us to follow your example. Amen.

Friday, December 22

Face to Face with Jesus

† **Mark 15:39**—*When the centurion, who stood facing him, saw how he breathed his last he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God.’*

Surprised? A Gentile and a Roman with presumably no background of Jewish scripture or prophecy is the first to offer a sincere profession of faith after the death of Jesus. Even Jesus’ closest friends were unconvinced of his divinity until after the resurrection. The key to the centurion’s belief and profession was his face-to-face encounter with God.

When in your life were you certain of Jesus’ divinity and how did you profess this faith? Was it contemplating a favorite scripture passage, a sacramental experience or sudden heavenly comfort in a time of despair? When we come face to face with Jesus, the truth of his word and offer of salvation must lead us to proclaim, “Surely this is the Son of God.”

As we conclude this Advent, let us meditate on the wondrous gift of Jesus, his face close to ours telling of his unconditional love for each of us.

—JOE WUJEK

Jesus may we see your face in the manger, in your word and in each other. Amen.

Saturday, December 23

Nothing is Profane if We Have Eyes to See

† **Luke 24:30-31**—*And it happened, that while he was with them at the table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. With that their eyes were open, and they recognized him.*

Christmas 2023 is once again more than just around the corner. It's almost upon us! We believers are invited to make this Christmas a unique and fresh faith experience. Yes, we believe in our heads that Jesus is God and a human being, and through the life of God in all of us, we are ONE with our human family and all creation, and Jesus wants us to experience Christmas love in our HEARTS as well as in our minds, and in our already full lives. Assuredly, such a holy and deep and feeling experience will change us forever. Nothing is profane and ordinary because God has reached out to us. All creation is God-touched, and a sacramental sign of God with us. May the Lord Jesus open our eyes and hearts to recognize Jesus in our brothers and sisters and especially the poor and in those different from ourselves as Jesus opened the eyes of the Emmaus brethren. Really seeing—seeing with our whole being—Christ in others, is our Christmas gift to them, and to our God who invites us to a deeper mind and heart of Christmas faith. May our encounter in the Eucharist open our eyes as never before to recognize the Christ in us all, and in all creation.

—FR. JOHN MCGRANN

Lord, may our eyes and hearts always remain open to your presence. Amen

Fourth Week of Advent: The Wondrous Gift is Given

It was my granddaughter, Liesl's eighth Christmas. Everyone was gathered in my living room, eagerly anticipating what was inside the beautifully wrapped gifts beneath the tree. As each gift was opened and the proper responses made and the giver thanked, we all waited for the final and best gift to be opened. It was the largest gift under the tree and had Liesl's name on it. Her dad handed it to her, and we all watched as she carefully unwrapped the gift and opened the box which contained a smaller beautifully wrapped gift. When that gift was opened, she found another beautifully wrapped gift. This continued until she reached the seventh box which contained a key chain with a Mickey Mouse charm and a note with the message: "Merry Christmas, we are going to Disneyland for Spring Break!!!"

My granddaughter had received a gift with a promise just like Mary and the world who received a gift with a promise on that holy night in Bethlehem.

Share: *Have you ever received a gift that meant a lot to you or turned out better than you expected?*

† **Scripture: Read Luke 1:26-38**

Share: *How much of Gabriel's message do you think Mary understood?*

Commentary

Like my granddaughter who received a gift with a promise, Mary too was given a “wondrous gift” with a promise. She was to be the mother of Jesus, “the Son of the ‘Most High,’ whose kingdom would have no end.” The world had been waiting for the promised Messiah for a long time. Did Mary realize that this promised Messiah was not entering the world by coming down from the clouds in a golden chariot announced with blaring trumpets, but coming to his people from nine months of being nurtured in her womb and humbly born in a stable and laid in a manger?

Share: *God loves to surprise us. Share about a time when something about which you’d been praying, turned out better than you expected.*

Reflection

Mary gave birth to Jesus and wrapped him in swaddling clothes. The “wondrous gift” was given. But we, and Mary, had no idea about what was in that gift until it was completely unwrapped, and the swaddling clothes became the burial cloths that were found neatly folded in the empty tomb. It is at the resurrection of “the Son of the ‘Most High’” that the gift is fully revealed. As you once again return to Bethlehem this Christmas and adore the baby in the manger, may your eyes and heart be open to the “Wondrous Gift” we have been given.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sharing your Son with us and giving us the gift of eternal life with you. Amen.

Monday, December 25

Letting Go to Recognize His Glory

† **Christmas Day, John 1:14**—*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son.*

I couldn't see it at first in the busy, garbage and rat-infested streets of New York. Its loud hustle and flights from La Guardia disturbing every minute of every day. Gun violence, poverty, homelessness and drugs, threats on every block.

Even around the domino tables, or the basketball courts with no nets, or along the Bronx River with Rikers Island in the distance, or in the traffic-misery of the Cross Bronx Expressway.

It takes a little bit of letting go of your own sense of what is right and wrong to learn to recognize his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth on the subway platforms across from Lincoln Hospital on 149th Street, or in the Emergency Room at three in the morning, with the stabbing victims and those spaced out on methadone—or heroin.

Or when the shepherds walked into that stable, full of dung and urine, the stench of people who had walked for days. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

—FR. BONAVENTURE RUMMELL

Lord, may we never lose sight of your glory. Amen.



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