

Roman Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough

**A Nine Day Retreat
For Advent
Friday 17th December
To
Christmas Day 2021**



A Nine Day Retreat for Advent

This nine day retreat begins on Friday 17th December 2021 and concludes on Christmas Day. The aim of this retreat is to lead us to the great feast when we celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The very day when God came to us in the flesh of a tiny, vulnerable baby. During our 'modern' times people often feel that the celebration of Christmas has become swamped in advertising, spending money, time and energy to such an extent that we become tired, in debt and by the time Christmas day arrives we either have a sense of relief or anxiety, or maybe both. It is hoped that by spending a short period of time during each of these nine days in prayer and reflection that we might reconnect with God, that we may become more aware of the real importance of this beautiful time of year and that we encounter Christ anew.

- Each day we will spend a short time in silent prayer, preparing ourselves to read the Gospel passage which will be the Gospel read at Mass for that day.
- After a short period of silence, read the Gospel passage again, slowly, listening for God speaking to you (maybe read it aloud). Is there a word or phrase that finds a home in your heart? If so, reflect on why it may be significant for you.
- Take some time to rest in God who seeks you out in the silence and move into praying to God, bringing your joys, your sorrows, difficulties, every aspect of your life. Share these with God who longs to hear them and touch your heart with his comfort and love.
- Pray one decade of the Rosary in thanksgiving and for the needs of the world, choosing the mystery that most resonates with you
- This Novena can be said at any time of the day
- **You will need your Bible or Missal** (if you don't have one there are many online editions that can be accessed freely)



Day One: Friday 17th December

If you have a candle or Advent wreath, why not light it as a reminder that Christ is our light.

We begin with the sign of the Cross: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Relax in God's presence. Become aware of the silence and be comfortable and at peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us. Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us.

Our Gospel today is about the ancestry of Jesus. Matthew 1:1-17

- Read the Gospel passage. Do not rush to get to the end and then sit silently for a short while.
- Read the Gospel again but slowly this time. Listening for a word or phrase that speaks to you. Pray with that word or phrase and reflect on why it resonates with you
- Rest for a while in God's presence listening and speaking to God as you would to a close friend or loved one (Take as long as you wish)



Light on the Gospel: The genealogy of Jesus functions not as a historical record but as a way to situate Jesus in relation to the memorable characters in Israel's history. It tells who he is by recounting who his people are. The linear progression of thirty nine male ancestors is broken at four points by the names of women. They are not the ones who would immediately come to mind as great figures from Israel's past. Each has an unusual twist to her story. Tamar (v3) after being widowed, took decisive action to coerce her father-in-law, Judah, to provide an heir for her to continue the Davidic line (Gen 38). Tamar is the only woman in the Hebrew Scriptures who is called righteous (Gen 38:26). Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho (Josh 2) risked disobeying the orders of the king of Jericho and sheltered spies sent from Joshua to reconnoiter the land (Josh 2). She gave birth to Boaz the great grand-father of David. Ruth, a Moabite woman, returned with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem, rather than stay with her own people after her husband Mahlon died (Ruth 5-6). Finally, the wife of Uriah is the one who bore David's son Solomon after David arranged to have Uriah killed in battle (2 Sam 11). Each story speaks of how women took bold actions outside the bounds of regular patriarchal marriage to enable God's purpose to be brought to fruition in unexpected ways. The women's presence in the midst of the male ancestors of Jesus also signals the integral role that women disciples play in the community of Jesus' followers. They remind the reader that women are not marginal to the history of Israel or Christianity.

(The Gospel according to Matthew by Barbara E Reid, 2005)

- Say a decade of the Rosary (whichever mystery you feel most drawn to).

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, creator of everything and everyone, thank you for coming to live among us, for showing your love and concern for all peoples in all times. Hear the prayers of your people who want to come ever closer to you. We praise you and consecrate ourselves to you as we prepare to celebrate your coming.

Amen

Day Two: Saturday 18th December

All as for 17th December except:

Our Gospel today is how Jesus came to be born. Matthew 1:18-24)

Light on the Gospel: Marriage in first-century Palestine, usually arranged by the two families, took place in two steps. There was a formal betrothal before witnesses that was legally



binding. The bride remained in her father's home for another year or so until the ceremony of her transfer to the home of her husband. Jesus' conception occurs between these two stages. The agency of the Holy Spirit (V18) is not sexual; rather the Spirit is God's life-giving power evident in creation (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30) and in prophetic speech. It is the divine power at work in Jesus and his disciples. Joseph is faced with an impossible dilemma. He is a righteous man, that is, one who is faithful to the demands of the Law. The Law prescribed death for adulterers (Deut 22:23-27). But Joseph is unwilling to publicly denounce his

betrothed. A secret divorce is not possible; two witnesses are needed, and Mary's pregnancy would be known by all her relatives and townspeople. Joseph decides on a middle course: he will divorce her quietly without stating the reasons. This solution does not prevent Mary from being exposed to public shame. The only way to prevent this would be for Joseph to complete his marriage to her and adopt the child as his own. This is what the angel instructs him to do in a dream (V20).

(The Gospel according to Matthew by Barbara Reid, 2005)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, creator of everything and everyone, thank you for coming to live among us, for showing your love and concern for all peoples in all times. Hear the prayers of your people who want to come ever closer to you. We praise you and consecrate ourselves to you as we prepare to celebrate your coming.

Amen

Day Three: Sunday 19th December 4th Sunday of Advent

All as for 17th December except:

Our Gospel today speaks of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Luke 1:39-45

Light on the Gospel: The prophet Micah announces the great promise of God: that the small tribe which settled in the insignificant town of Bethlehem will one day produce the ruler of Israel. But between that promise and its fulfilment there is a long interim period of destruction, suffering and exile. When your country is overrun and you are



dumped in a strange land, when your songs are unsung and your musical instruments are in storage, it's difficult to hold on to a promise, even when that is the promise of God. It's precisely that promise that gives substance to the hope of the people, and gives direction to their lives. At the beginning of Luke's Gospel we are introduced to an aged, married couple who stay alive in that hope – Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. They represent the hope that did not die, and they see it fulfilled in their son, John, who is to prepare for the one from Bethlehem. Mary races to see this sign of hope fulfilled. In the meeting of the old Elizabeth and the young Mary, the Old Testament meets the New Testament, the ancient promise meets its fulfilment in two mothers – It is a time of Good News, of great blessing; it is a time of womb- shaking rejoicing.

(Seasons of the Word. Denis McBride, 2005)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing prayer (Taken from Morning Prayer of the Church for 4th Sunday of Advent)

Lord, open our hearts to your grace.
Through the angel's message to Mary
we have learned to believe in the
Incarnation of Christ your Son:
lead us by his passion and cross
to the glory of his resurrection.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever
Amen



Day Four: Monday 20th December

All as for 17th December except:

Today we hear Mary's response to the angel Gabriel. Luke 1:26-38



Light on the Gospel: Gabriel, the messenger of God, addresses Mary respectfully as the favoured one of God. Mary is startled at the angel's saying, as Zechariah was startled at the angel's presence. Gabriel reassures Mary and tells her the purpose of his visit. She will bear a son and call him Jesus. Gabriel goes on to describe the future greatness of this child in a way which echoes Nathan's promise to David, which formed the basis for the messianic expectation (2 Sam 7:9-16). As

Zechariah countered the angel's proclamation by pointing to the difficulty of old age, Mary points to the fact that she is still a virgin...Mary's question gives Gabriel the opportunity to announce the extraordinary manner in which she will conceive – through the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke states that because of this conception, the child will be called holy, the Son of God... Mary's response is unparalleled in other annunciation narratives: she is the one who when hearing the word of God gladly allows the word to form her life.

(The Gospel of Luke-A Reflective Commentary, Denis McBride CSSR, 1991)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer (Taken from Morning Prayer of the Church for 20th December)

Lord, at the angel's message
Mary, the immaculate Virgin,
became the temple of God
and was filled with the light of the Holy Spirit
when she received your Word.
Grant that, after her example,
we may humbly and steadfastly
follow your will.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen



Day 5: Tuesday 21 December

All as for 17th December except:

Once again, today's Gospel focusses on the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Luke 1:39-45

Light on the Gospel: There are several dimensions to the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth: Human kindness and affection; qualities which are so important in this Gospel. It is a week's walk Nazareth to the territory of Judah. Mary goes to support her ageing relative and share with her the excitement and worries of pregnancy: Fulfilment; there is never any doubt that the process taking place is guided in detail by God's plan. Elizabeth's greeting slips out so easily that one can easily miss its import. The title 'Lord' has already been used in the infancy stories a dozen times, each time signifying the Lord God, the initiator of the whole chain of events. Now for the first time it is used of Jesus. This one word is an excellent measure of the gradually deepening understanding and appreciation of the person of Jesus during the development of the New Testament. It was the word used in the Greek Bible to translate the unpronounceable Name of God, Yahweh. The name is full of awe and dignity. (Daily Bible Commentary – Luke, Henry Wansbrough OSB, 2007)



- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer (Taken from Evening Prayer of the Church for 21st December)

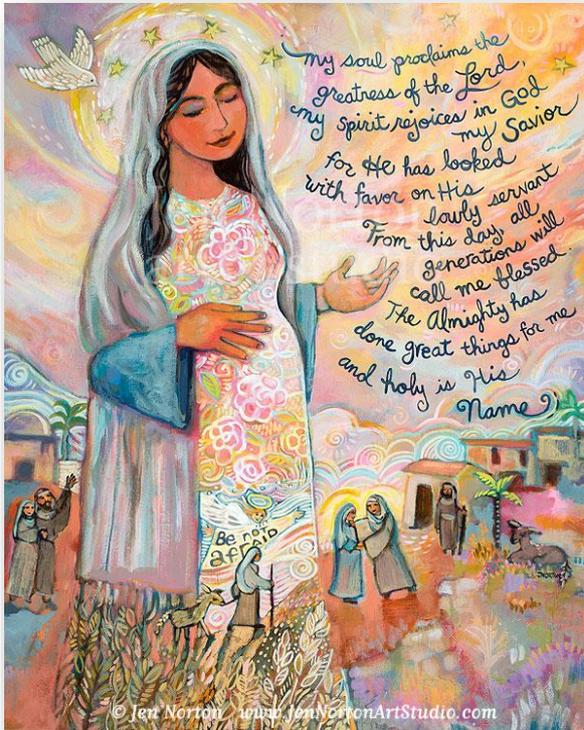
In your goodness, Lord,
Listen to your people's prayer.
As we rejoice in the coming of your Son
in flesh and blood like ours,
grant that when he comes again in
glory
We may receive the gift of eternal
life.
Through our Lord Jesus | Christ, your
Son,
who lives and reign with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen



Day 6: Wednesday 22 December

All as for 17th December except:

In our Gospel today Mary proclaims “The Almighty has done great things for me”. Luke 1:46-56



Light on the Gospel: What would make you celebrate wildly, without inhibition? Perhaps it would be the news that someone close to you who'd been very sick was getting better and would soon be home. Perhaps it would be news that your country had escaped from tyranny and oppression, and could look forward to a new time of freedom and prosperity. Perhaps it would be seeing that the floods which had threatened your home were going down again. Perhaps it would be the message that all your money worries, or business worries had been sorted out. Whatever it might be, you'd do things you normally wouldn't. You might dance round with a friend. You might telephone everyone you can think of and invite them to a party. You might sing a song. You might even make a new one up as you went along- probably out of snatches of poems and songs you already knew, or

perhaps adding your own new words to a great old hymn. If you lived in any kind of culture where rhythm and beat mattered, it would be the sort of song you could clap your hands to or stamp on the ground. **NOW READ MARY'S SONG LIKE THAT.** It's one of the most famous songs in Christianity. It's been whispered in monasteries, chanted in cathedrals, recited in remote churches by evening candlelight, and set to music. It's the GOSPEL before the Gospel, a fierce bright shout of triumph thirty weeks before Bethlehem, thirty years before Calvary and Easter.

(Luke for Everyone, Tom Wright, 2004)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer (Taken from Morning Prayer of the Church for 22nd December)

God and Father,
you looked in pity on fallen man
and redeemed us by the coming of
your Son. Grant that we who profess our firm and
humble faith in the incarnation of
our Redeemer may have some
share in his divine life.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

Amen.



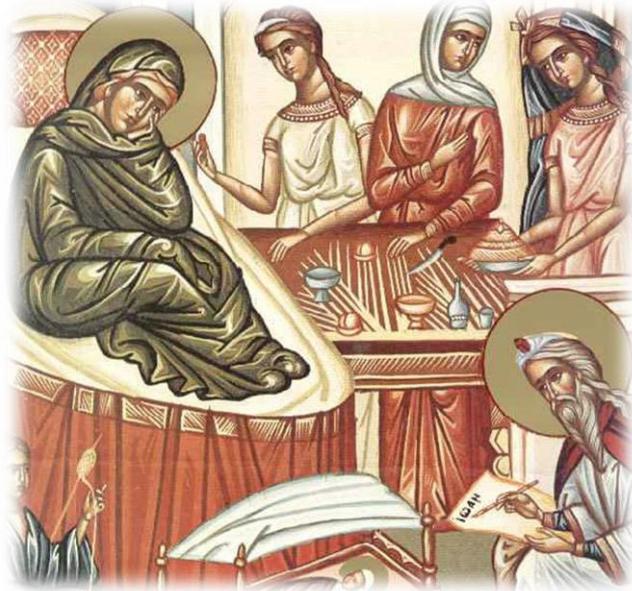
Day 7: Thursday 23rd December

All as for 17th December except:

In today's Gospel we read the account of the birth and naming of John. Luke 1:57-66

Light on the Gospel: As the messenger of God had foretold, Elizabeth gives birth to a son. The neighbours and relatives discover the good news after the birth has taken place, and they

come to rejoice with Elizabeth that the Lord has looked so kindly on her. The occasion for the gathering is the family ceremony of circumcision, which normally took place eight days after the birth (Gen 17:12), and the naming of the child, which usually happened immediately after birth. There was a tradition in priestly circles to name the child after his grandfather; however, the expectation in this gathering is to call the new child after his father. Elizabeth intervenes to say that the child will be called John, a name which means "Yahweh's gracious gift". The child's



name speaks of his origin and vocation: he comes as a gift from God, and his life will be a gift to God's people. Clearly, Elizabeth is departing from traditional practice for the neighbour remind her that none of her relatives is so called.

(The Gospel of Luke – A Reflective Commentary, Denis McBride Csr, 1991)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer (Taken from Evening Prayer of the Church for 22nd December)

Almighty God,
now that the birthday of your Son as
man is drawing near,
we pray that your eternal Word,
who took flesh in the womb of the
Virgin Mary and came to dwell
among us,
will show your unworthy people the
greatness of his love and mercy,
who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen



Day 8: Friday 24th December

All as for 17th December except:

Today, in our Gospel we hear the great hymn of Zechariah. Luke 1:67-79

Light on the Gospel: Zechariah's joyful song of praise falls into two halves, the first looking back to the promises of God which are now fulfilled, the second looking forward to the prophetic role of the child so recently born. God has visited his people and set them free, proclaims Zechariah. Free from oppression or from sin? The domination of the Romans was certainly hated, but just how oppressive it was remains disputed. There was financial and economic distress, and the distress of uncured sickness. But there is no firm evidence that there was widespread dire penury and want. In this canticle it is more likely that Zechariah has in mind primarily the freedom to serve the Lord. John is to be a prophet preparing the way for the Lord, as will be seen when his ministry begins. He is to proclaim forgiveness and repentance for salvation, paving the way for Jesus' own message of forgiveness. He is to guide our feet into the way of peace. By doing so he begins the mission which will continue into the mission of the disciples.



(Daily Bible Commentary-Luke, Henry Wansbrough OSB, 2007)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer – From the Iona Community

You keep us waiting,
you, the God of all time,
want us to wait for the right time
in which to discover who we are,
where we must go, who will be with us,
and what we must do.
So, thank you...for the looking time.

You keep us looking.
You, the God of all space, want us to look in the right and wrong
places for signs of hope,
for people who are hopeless,
for visions of a better world that will
appear among the disappointments of the world we know.
So, thank you...for the looking time.

You keep us loving.
You, the God whose name is love,
want us to be like you- to love the loveless
and the unlovely and the unlovable;
to love without jealousy or design or threat,
and most difficult of all, to love ourselves.
So, thank you... for the loving time.

And in all this you keep us,
through hard questions with no easy answers;
through failing where we had hoped to succeed
and making an impact when we felt useless;
through the patience and dreams and the love of
others; and through Jesus Christ and his Spirit,
you keep us.
Amen.



Day 9: Saturday 25th December Christmas Day

All as for 17th December except:

Prayer: *Lord, with your birth as a human child you transformed the world. You became one of us so that you could take us to yourself and give us a share in your divine life. Let me treasure this honour and realize my dignity. Amen*

We read the Gospel that was proclaimed at Dawn Mass today Luke 2:15-20

Light on the Gospel: Luke gives more attention to the interpretation of Jesus' birth by the angels and shepherd's visitation than he does to the birth itself. His account of the birth of Jesus is simple and brief: while the couple are in Bethlehem, Mary's time comes; she delivers her firstborn, warms him in swaddling cloths and lays him in a manger because there is no room in the lodgings. Luke does not say where the birth took place, only where Mary laid the child. The manger was a feeding trough for animals. Tradition dating back to Justin has the birth place in a shepherd's cave; other traditions speak of the birth place as the courtyard of the inn, where animals would be tied up, and which would act as a natural overflow from the inn. Mary swaddles the child: swaddling cloths were baby-wraps for keeping the child snug and warm. There is comedy and mystery in the promised one of God in the form of a tiny, vulnerable creature in swaddling cloths. There is tragedy in the knowledge of what will become of the child; but, for the moment, tragedy is a stranger. This is the night of perpetual dawn.



(The Gospel of Luke – A Reflective Commentary, Denis McBride Csr, 1991)

- Say a decade of the Rosary

Closing Prayer

Lord, at this Christmas time
of peace and goodwill on earth
hear the prayer we offer
on behalf of our suffering world,
a world that seems so full of conflict,
so shrouded in darkness.

Your Son came among us
not in power and majesty,
but in the tenderness
of a new-born child,
to show us the loving kindness
of our Father in heaven.

Inspire the hearts of political leaders
to find just and peaceful solutions
to the conflicts that beset our world
so that our human family
can live in harmony and peace.

Enlighten our path forward,
shine in our darkness like a candle,
that we may never despair,
but in spite of all the uncertainties
in our world today
and all the barbed barriers
of prejudice and hatred
that we seek the true freedom
that comes from You.

Amen

*Taken from: A Candle At Christmas. Published
by the Prayer Trust 2012.*

**A peaceful and blessed Christmas to
you and all those that you love.**



