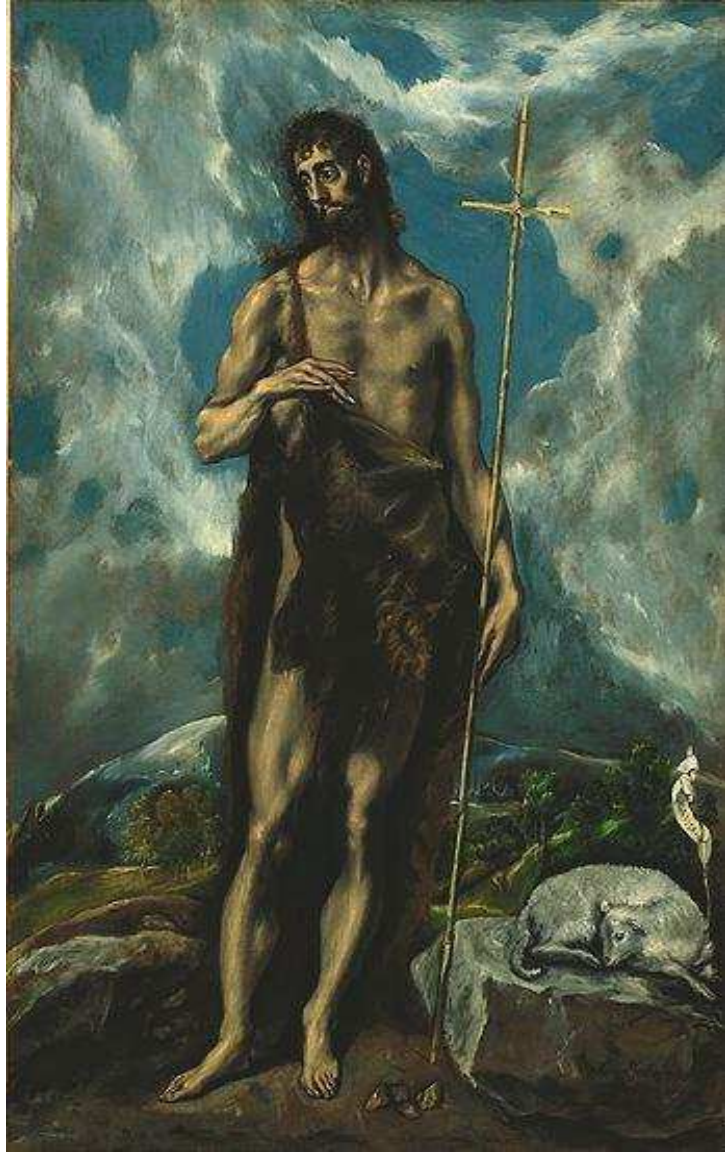


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*First Reading**Isaiah 1.1-18*

The vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, which deals with Judah and Jerusalem during the times of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah:

Listen, heaven, and pay attention, earth,

because YHWH has said this:

“I have nurtured children and reared them,
but they have rebelled against me.

Oxen know their owner

and donkeys recognize their master’s trough;

but Israel knows nothing;

my people do not think.”

What a shame! A sinful nation,

a people burdened down with their immorality,

a brood of degenerates,

children who corrupt everyone!

They have abandoned YHWH

and have provoked the anger

of Israel’s Holy One;

they have turned their backs on him.

Why should you be punished once more?

You will only keep up your defiance.

The body's whole head is sick,
its whole heart is frail;
from the sole of its feet to the top of the head
there is nothing sound about it,
only wounds and infected sores
that have not healed over or been bandaged
or soothed with ointment.
Your country is a wasteland,
fire has consumed your cities;
foreigners eat up your land as you look on,
and it is barren, toppled by aliens.
Daughter Zion is left like a hut in a vineyard,
like a shed in a melon patch,
like a city under siege.
If YHWH who commands armies
had not left a few survivors,
we would have become like Sodom,
no better than Gomorrah.
But listen to what YHWH says,
authorities in Sodom;
pay attention to our God's command,
people of Gomorrah:
"What good are all your sacrifices to me?"
YHWH says,
"I have had enough of your holocausts of rams
and of the fat from the cattle you raise;
I take no pleasure in the blood of a bull
or a lamb or a goat.
Who asks this of you
when you come into my presence?
Stop trampling down my courts!
Bring me no more worthless sacrifices,
and incense is something I loathe.
I cannot stand your New Moons
your Sabbaths, convoking assemblies

your immoral sacred meetings;
No, I detest these New Moons and festivals of yours;
they are a nuisance,
and I am sick of them.
When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will close my eyes to you;
and even though you keep praying all the more,
I will not listen,
because your hands are full of blood.
Wash it off; make yourselves clean,
put your vices behind you out of sight of my eyes.
Stop doing evil
and learn to do good;
Pursue virtue,
reprimand oppressors,
defend the fatherless,
take the part of widows.
Come now, let us act reasonably,”
says YHWH.
“And then, though your sins are blood-red,
they will be white as snow;
even if they are crimson,
they will be like wool.”

Wash yourselves off; make yourselves clean. Rid your hearts of evil, and keep it out of my sight, and even if your sins are blood-red they will become white as snow.

Stop doing evil and learn to do good; always pursue virtue, and even if your sins are blood-red, they will be white as snow.

Second Reading *Catechetical Instruction by Cyril of Jerusalem*

We do not simply preach one coming of the Prince; we announce a second as well, much more glorious than the first. The first coming was characterized by the endurance of suffering, while the second will bring a coronation into a divine kingdom.

In general, there are two aspects to anything that deals with our Master Prince Jesus: there is a fathering by God before time began, and a birth from a virgin when time reached its completion. There is a hidden coming, like dew on fleece, and a coming every eye will see, which is still in the future.

At the first coming, he was wrapped in his blanket in a manger; at his second coming he will have light for his clothes; in the first coming, he endured the cross and made nothing of its disgrace; in the second coming, he will be in glory, attended by an army of angels.

And so we look beyond the first coming and are waiting for the second one. At the first coming, we said, "Praise the one who is coming in the Master's name;" at the second we will say it once again; we will go out with the angels to meet the Master and cry out with admiration, "Praise the one who is coming in the Master's name!"

The Savior is not coming to be subject to our judgment again, but to pass judgment on those he was judged by. During his own trial, he was silent; but then he will speak to those who committed the outrages against him and remind them, "You did all this, and I was silent."

His first coming was to fulfill his loving plan, to teach people by gently persuading them. But this time, whether they like it or not, people will be forced to be subjects of his Kingdom.

The prophet Malachi says this of the two comings: "The Master you are looking for will come suddenly to his Temple." That is one coming. But he says in reference to another coming, "Then the all-powerful Master will come, and will anyone survive the time of his appearing, and who will be able to stand the sight of him? Because he is like a refiner's fire, a fuller's lye, and he will take his seat and refine and cleanse."

These two comings are also referred to by Paul in his letter to Titus: "The blessings of the God who rescues us have shone on every human being and educated us in how to reject secularism and worldly desires, and how to live sensibly, virtuously, and religiously in the present environment, keeping before our eyes in the appearing of the majesty of our great God and rescuer Prince Jesus." Notice how he speaks of a first coming, for which he shows gratitude, and a second, the one we are still waiting for.

That is why the faith we profess has been handed down to you in these words: “He rose into heaven and is enthroned beside the Father, and he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

Our Master Prince Jesus, then, will come down from heaven; he will come at the end of the world, in glory, on the last day—because there *will* be an end to this world and the created world will be remade into something new.

As I watch from far off, I see the Power of God approaching, and the whole earth enveloped in a cloud. Go out to him and cry, “Tell us if you are the one who is to reign over the people of Israel.”

All the peoples on the earth, all of the race of human beings, rich and poor alike, go out to him and cry, “Shepherd of Israel, please listen to us; since you lead Joseph’s race as if it were your flock, tell us if you are the one who is to reign over the people of Israel.”

Prayer

All-powerful God, since our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word, please increase our longing for our Savior the Prince, and give us the strength to grow in love, so that the dawn of his coming will find us full of joy at his presence, welcoming the light of his truth. We make this request in the name of the Master Jesus. Amen

Resume with the Te Deum



First Reading

Isaiah 1.21-27, 2.1-5

How much a prostitute the faithful city has become!

It was full of virtue,
Honesty made its home there;

but now it houses murderers.
 Your silver has turned into dross,
 your will is diluted with water;
 your kings are rebels
 and friends of thieves;
 everyone is fond of bribes
 and pursues profit;
 they do not defend orphans,
 and they ignore the cases widows bring.
 And that is why this is said by the Master,
 YHWH, commander of armies, the Power of Israel:
 “Yes, I will rid myself of my opponents
 and avenge myself on my enemies.
 I will turn my hand against you,
 and burn away your dross
 and eliminate all your alloy.
 I will restore your judges to what they were at first,
 and return your advisors to the starting-place;
 and afterward you will be called
 city of virtue, faithful city.”
 Zion will be redeemed by justice,
 and those in her who repent by their virtue.
 This is what Isaiah, the son of Amoz saw in reference to Judah and
 Jerusalem:
 What will happen some day in the future is
 that the mountain where YHWH resides
 will be set up as the highest mountain,
 and will be raised above the hills;
 and every nation will flow into it.
 People after people will come and say,
 “Come, let us go up YHWH’s mountain
 to the residence of Jacob’s God;
 he will teach us his ways,
 and we will walk along his paths.”
 Because it is out of Zion that the Law will be promulgated,

and YHWH's utterances will come from Jerusalem.
He will be the judge over many, many nations
and pass sentence on many, many peoples.
And they will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not raise its swords against nation,
and they will no longer train for war.
Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk
in YHWH's light.

Come, let us go up the Master's mountain to the residence of Jacob's God. He will teach us his ways, and we will walk along his paths.

The Messiah, the one called the Prince, is coming, and when he comes he will teach us everything. He will teach us his ways, and we will walk along his paths.

Second Reading

A pastoral by St. Charles Borromeo

My friends, now is the favorable time spoken of by the Spirit, the day of rescue, peace, and reconciliation: the great season of Advent. This is the time that was so eagerly awaited by the patriarchs and prophets, the time that holy Simeon was so glad to see. This is the season that the Church has always celebrated with special solemnity. We too should always observe it with faith and love, offering our praise and gratitude to the Father for the mercy and love he has shown us in this mystery. In his infinite love for us, even though we were sinners, he sent his only Son to free us from the tyranny of Satan, to invite us to heaven and to welcome us into its most profound depths, to show us truth itself, to train us in proper behavior, to plant seeds of virtue within us, to enrich us with the treasures of grace, and to make us children of God and heirs of eternal life.

Each year, as the Church recalls this mystery, she urges us to renew the memory of the great love God has shown us. This holy season teaches us that the Prince's coming was not only for the benefit of his contemporaries; his power is still to be communicated to all of us. We will share his power if, in our holy faith in the sacraments, we willingly

accept the grace the Prince earned for us, and live by that grace in obedience to the Prince.

The Church asks us to understand that the Prince, who came once bodily, is ready to come again. When we get rid of all the obstacles to his presence, he will come, at any hour or moment, to make his spiritual home in our hearts, and bring with him the riches of his grace.

In her concern for our rescue, our loving mother the Church uses this holy season to give us instruction through hymns, songs, and other forms of expression—of voice or ritual—that are used by the Holy Spirit. She shows us how grateful we should be for such a blessing, and how to gain benefit from it: our hearts should be as much prepared for the coming of the Prince as if he were still to come into this world. The same lesson is given to us for our imitation by the words and example of the holy men of the Old Treaty.

Blow the trumpets in Zion! Summon the nations! Gather the people and tell them the good news: Our God and our Savior is coming!

Proclaim the good news; let it be heard; tell it to everyone, shout it aloud: Our God and Savior is coming!

Prayer

Master, our God, please help us prepare for the coming of your Son the Prince. May he find us waiting eagerly in joyful prayer. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 2.6-22, 4.2-6

You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob,
because they are filled with eastern mystics;
they are fortune tellers, like the Philistines,

and they are attracted to aliens.
Also, their land is full of silver and gold,
and there is no end to their wealth;
their land is full of horses
and there is no end to their chariots;
their land is full of idols
and they worship their own handiwork:
things their own fingers have created.
People bow down to them,
and everyone degrades himself.
And so do not forgive them!
Go into caves in the rocks and hide in the dirt
from terror of YHWH
at the radiance of his majesty.
Conceited stares will be put down,
and arrogance will be disgraced,
and only YHWH will be elevated on that day,
because the day of YHWH, the commander of armies
will come down on everything proud and conceited,
upon everything that elevates itself,
and it will be brought down:
upon all the Lebanon cedars that grow tall on the mountain,
and all the oaks in Bashan;
upon all the lofty mountains
and all the hills that push themselves upward;
upon every high tower
and on every fortified wall;
upon all the ships in Tarshish,
and every stately vessel.
Human superiority will be degraded
and human arrogance will be humbled;
only YHWH will be elevated on that day,
and he will smash all the idols to pieces.
And they will hide in the holes in rocks
and in caves in the ground

from terror of YHWH
 and the radiance of his majesty
 when he comes forward to send the earth into convulsions.
 On that day, a man will throw to moles and bats
 his silver idols and his golden gods,
 which each of them made for their own worship,
 and go into the clefts in the rocks
 and into crevices in the cliffs
 from terror of YHWH
 and the radiance of his majesty
 when he comes forward to send the earth into convulsions.
 Keep away from men like these,
 whose only spirit is the breath in their nostrils;
 what good are they?
 On that day, YHWH's branch will be lovely and radiant,
 and the earth's yield will be excellent and flavorful
 for those in Israel who have escaped.

And what will happen is that those who are left in Zion and remain
 in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded as among the
 living in Jerusalem. When the Master has cleaned off the filth from the
 daughters of Zion and purged Jerusalem of the blood within her by the
 burning wind of his judgment, then YHWH will create above every
 home on Mount Zion and above all her meeting-places, a cloud of
 smoke during the day and the glow of a flaming fire at night. Because his
 glory will be a covering for everything, a tent of shade during the day to
 protect from the heat, a place of refuge, and a shelter from storm and
 rain.

Conceited staves will be put down, and arrogance will be disgraced, and
 only the Master will be elevated on that day. They will see the Son of
 Man coming in the clouds in the sky with great power and majesty. Only
 the Master will be elevated on that day.

Second Reading

A sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen

The very Son of God, older than time itself, the invisible, incomprehensible, incorporeal beginning from the beginning, the light from light, the source of life and immortality, the visible counterpart of the model, the unmoved seal, the perfect likeness, the definition and Word of the Father, is the one who comes to his own image and takes our nature for the good of our nature, and unites himself to an intellectual soul for the good of my soul—to purify what is similar by what is similar.

He takes onto himself everything human, except for sin. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary, who had first been prepared in her soul and body by the Spirit (since his engendering had to be given respect, and her virginity also had to be given previous respect). He emerges as God after taking on the nature: one thing from two opposites, matter and spirit, where one bestowed divinity and the other received it.

The one who gives riches becomes poor; he takes on material poverty, so that I can achieve the riches of his divinity. The one who is full becomes empty; he is emptied of his glory for a short time, so that I can share his fullness.

What is this wealth of goodness? What is this mystery that is all around me? I received the image of God, but failed to keep it; but he takes on my matter, to bring rescue to the image, and immortality to matter. He joins us in a second union, a union far more wondrous than the first.

Holiness had to be brought into mankind by the humanity taken by one who was God, so that God would win the battle over the tyrant and by this set us free and lead us back to himself with his Son as the intermediary. The Son brought this about for the honor of the Father, to whom the Son is obedient in every way.

The Good Shepherd, who is ready to give up his life for his sheep, came in search of the straying sheep to the mountains and hills on which you used to offer sacrifices. When he found it, he took it on the shoulders that bore the wood of the cross, and carried it back to the life of heaven.

The Prince, the light of every light, comes after John, the lamp that precedes him. The Word of God comes after the voice in the desert; the bridegroom comes after the bridegroom's friend, who makes a people fit

for the Master by bathing them in water in preparation for the Spirit.

We need God to take our matter and die, so that we can live. We have died along with him, so that we will be purified. And we have come back to life again with him, because we have died with him—and we have been glorified with him, because we have come back to life again with him.

When the proper time finally came, God sent his Son into the world, born from a virgin, subject to the Law, to rescue those who were subject to the Law.

Because of his great love for us, God sent his Son in the form of sinful human nature to rescue those who were subject to the Law.

Prayer

God of mercy and consolation, please help us in our weakness and free us from sin; please listen to our prayers, so that we will be able to find joy in the coming of your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 5.1-7

Now let me sing about my good friend.

My friend's song about his vineyard.

My good friend has a vineyard

on a very fertile hill.

He spaded it and cleared its stones,

and planted in it the choicest of vines.

He built a tower in the center of it

and made a winepress within it.

Then he waited for it to produce good grapes,

but it only yielded wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,

settle the case between me and my vineyard.
 What more could have been done to my vineyard
 that I have not done?
 Then why, when I looked for it to produce good grapes,
 did it produce wild grapes?
 And now, please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard:
 I will take away its hedge and burn it down;
 I will break down its wall and let it be trampled.
 I will wreck it completely;
 it will not be pruned or cultivated,
 and brambles and thorns will grow up in it.
 I will also command the clouds
 not to send rain upon it.
 You see, the vineyard of YHWH, commander of armies,
 is the house of Israel,
 and the men of Judah are his cherished plant.
 He looked for justice, and there he found oppression,
 he tried to find virtue, and heard only cries for help.

Boars come from the woods and root out the vine you planted, and the
 animals from the fields have eaten it up. Please look at this, Master, and
 come forward in your mighty power; do not let what your hands have
 made be destroyed.

Master, God Sabaoth, please look down from heaven and see this
 vine and protect it; do not let what your hands have made be destroyed.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Bernard

We know that there are three advents, three comings, of the Master.
 The third is between the other two; it is invisible, while the other two can
 be seen. In the first advent, he was seen on earth, living among human
 beings; he gives evidence himself that they saw him and hated him. In the
 final advent, "all of matter will see God's rescue, and they will look on
 the one they have pierced." The advent that is between these is a
 concealed one; in it only the chosen people see the Master within their
 own selves, and they are saved. In the first advent, our Master came in

our flesh and our weakness; in his central advent, he comes in spirit and power, and in the final advent, he will be seen in glory and majesty.

Because this intermediate advent lies between the other two, it is like a road on which we travel from the first to the last advent. In the first, the Prince was our redemption; in the last, he will appear as our life; in this central advent, he is our rest and consolation.

In case anyone thinks that what we are saying about this intermediate advent is something we made up, listen to what our Master himself says: "If anyone loves me, he will keep what I say, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him." And there is another passage of Scripture, which reads, "One who fears God will do good"; but something more has been said about the one who loves: that he will keep what God says. And where is what God says to be kept? Obviously, in the heart, as the prophet says: "I have hidden your words in my heart, so that I will not sin against you."

Keep what God says in this way: Let it enter your very being, let it take possession of your desires and your whole way of life. Make goodness your food, and your soul will find satisfaction in its richness. And remember to eat your bread, or your heart will wither. Fill your soul with richness and strength.

If you keep what God says in this way, it will also keep you. The Son, along with the Father, will come to you. The great Prophet who will build the new Jerusalem will come, the one who makes everything new. And this coming will fulfill what is written, "Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, we will also bear the likeness of the heavenly man." Just as Adam's sin spread through all mankind and took hold of everyone, so the Prince, who created and redeemed everyone, will glorify everyone, once he takes possession of everyone.

The Master will come down to us, radiant in his splendor, awesome in his power. He will bring his people peace and give them eternal life.

Our God will come, awesome in his power. He will bring his people peace and give them eternal life.

Prayer

Master, our God, please bestow on us the gift of being ready to accept the Prince when he comes in glory, and to share in the banquet of heaven, where he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 16.1-5, 17.4-8

The lamb is to be sent from Sela across the desert
to the ruler of the land
on the mountain of the daughter of Zion.
Because the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon
are like birds thrown out of the nest, fluttering about.
Confer together, make your decision;
turn your shadow into a night in the middle of day
to hide the outcasts
and conceal the fugitives.
Let the exiles from Moab live with you;
hide them from those who would loot them.
And when the extortion comes to an end
and the devastation is over,
and the oppressors have eaten up everything in the land and left,
a throne of mercy will be set up
and an honest judge will sit in David's tent
whose judgments follow justice and are swift to do right.
“On that day, what will happen
is that Jacob's glory will ebb,
and his healthy body will grow thin,
as when a reaper is gathering the harvest
and fills his arm with stalks;
like someone gleaning grain
in the Valley of Rephaim.

But still, a few grapes will be left there,
 like the olives left after it has been shaken,
 with two or three olives on the topmost branch,
 and four or five on those most fruitful.”
 This is what is said by YHWH, the God of Israel.
 And on that day, a man will look toward his Maker,
 and his eyes will respect Israel’s Holy One.
 He will not look toward altars,
 the work of his own hands;
 he will have no respect for what his fingers have produced,
 for sacred poles or altars of incense.

I will produce an heir for David: one who virtuous. He will make honest judgments rule upon earth; and this is the name they will give him: The Master is our virtue.

A throne of mercy will be set up, and on it an honest judge will sit: one who seeks justice and is swift to do right. And this is the name they will give him: the Master is our virtue.

Second Reading *A commentary on the Diatessaron by St. Ephrem*

To keep his students from asking the time of his coming, Jesus said, “No one knows about that time, not angels, not the Son. It is not for you to know times or occasions.” He has kept these things secret so that we will stay alert, with each of us thinking that he will come in our own time. If he had revealed the time of his coming, his coming would have lost its zest; it would no longer be something to be yearned for by the nations and the age in which it was revealed. He did promise that he would come, but did not say when he would come; and so every generation and age waits for him eagerly.

Even though the Master set out the signs of his coming, the time of their fulfillment has not been clearly revealed. And these signs have come and gone with a great many changes—even more, they are still with us. His final coming is like the first one: Just as holy men and prophets waited for him, thinking that he would come in their own day, so today each of the faithful longs to welcome him in his own time, because the

Prince has not made clear the day on which he will come.

And this is the main reason why he has not made it clear: so that no one will think that the one whose power and authority rules over all numbers and times is ruled by fate and time. He described the signs of his coming, and how could what he has described himself be hidden from him? And so he used these words to increase respect for the signs of his coming, so that from that day on every generation and age might think that he would come again during their own time.

So stay alert. When the body is asleep, nature takes control of us, and what is done is done by force, by the impulse of nature, not by our will. When deep listlessness takes possession of the soul—for example, with hesitancy or depression—the enemy overpowers it and makes it do what it does not choose to do. The force of nature, the enemy of the soul, is in control.

When the Master commanded us to be alert, he meant alertness in both parts of the human being: in the body, against its tendency to sleep, and in the soul, against laziness and timidity. As Scripture says, “Wake up, virtuous people!” and “I have come back to life, and I am still with you” and also “Do not lose heart. And that is why, since we have this service, we do not lose heart.”

I will make an eternal treaty with you; I will extend to you the promise given in my mercy to David. I have put him there as a witness to the peoples, and a leader and teacher of every nation.

This act of rescue God performs is for every nation, and they will pay attention to it. I have put him there as a witness to the peoples, and a leader and teacher of every nation.

Prayer

Father, we need your help. Please set us free of sin and bring us to life; and support us by your power. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Isaiah 19.16-25*

On that day the Egyptians will be like women trembling with fear, because YHWH, the commander of armies, is shaking his fist at them. And the land of Judah will be Egypt's terror; everyone who mentions it will quake with fear, because of the plan which YHWH, commander of armies, has in mind for them.

On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear by YHWH, commander of armies; and one of them will be called the "City of the Sun."

And on that day there will be an altar to YHWH within the land of Egypt, and a pillar dedicated to YHWH at its border; and it will stand as a sign and evidence about YHWH, the commander of armies, in the land of Egypt; because they will call out to YHWH because of their oppressors, and he will send them a Savior to be their champion and set them free.

And then YHWH will make himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will acknowledge YHWH on that day, and will make sacrifices and offer gifts to him; yes they will make vows to YHWH, and fulfill them. And YHWH will strike Egypt, but it will heal them; and they will return to YHWH, and they will plead with him and he will heal them.

On that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt, and the Egyptians into Assyria; and the Egyptians will be slaves of Assyria. And on that day Israel will make up a third partnership with Egypt and Assyria: a blessing within the land, something YHWH, commander of armies will bless, and say, "A blessing upon Egypt, my people, and Assyria, my handiwork, and upon Israel, my legacy."

On that day, the Egyptians will acknowledge the Master, and will worship him with offerings and gifts.

They will come from east and west, north and south to be seated in the Kingdom of God, and will worship him with offerings and gifts.

*Second Reading**from the Proslogion of St. Anselm*

Little man, leave your ordinary business for a little while; hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Leave aside your cares and troubles, and do not be so concerned about your work and jobs. Take a little time for God, and rest a while in him.

Go into the inner room in your mind. Shut out everything but God and whatever helps you look for him; and when you have shut the door, search him out. Now speak to God and say with your whole heart, "I am looking for your face; Master, it is your face I long for."

Master, my God, please teach my heart where and how to look for you, and where and how to find you. Master, if you are not here, where shall I look for you in your absence? But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you when you are here? Of course, you live in "inaccessible light"; but where is inaccessible light? And how am I to access inaccessible light? Who will guide me there and bring me into it so that I can see you there? And even then, in what guise or what forms will I find you? I have never seen you, Master, my God; I do not know what your face is like.

Supreme Master, what is this expatriate to do, so far from you? What is your slave to do, if he is tormented by love of you and thrown so far off from your face? He longs to see you, but your face is too far away from him; he yearns to approach you, and where you live is unapproachable; he wants to find you, and does not know your residence; he tries so hard to look for you, and cannot recognize your face.

Master, you are my God and you are my Master; but I have never seen you. You made me, and you remade me, and you have given me everything good that I possess, and still I do not know you. I was even made precisely to see you, and have not yet done what I was made for.

Master, how long is it to be? How long, Master, will you forget us? How long will you turn your face away from us? When will you look down on us and hear us? When will you shine into our eyes and show us your face? When will you give yourself back to us?

Please look down on us, Master; listen to us and shine on us; show us your real self. Please give yourself back to us so that we, whose lives are so evil without you, will be able to do well. Have pity on our efforts

and our straining toward you, because we have no strength apart from you.

Please teach me how to look for you, and while I am looking, show yourself to me, because I cannot even look for you unless you teach me, and I cannot find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me look for you in desiring you and desire you in looking for you; let me find you in loving you and love you in finding you.

We will never leave you, Master, because you will fill us with life and we will call upon your name. Please show us your face and we will be saved.

Remember us, please, Master, because of the love you have for your people. Come and bring us your rescue; show us your face and we will be saved.

Prayer

Our Master Jesus, please save us from our sins; please come and protect us from every danger and lead us to our rescue, because you are alive and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 21.6-12

This is what my Master said to me:

“Go, station a watchman,
and have him tell what he sees.

If he sees a chariot with a pair of horses,
someone riding a donkey, or someone riding a camel,
he is to pay attention:
very close attention.”

Then the watchman cried,

“I am a lion, my Master!

I stand on the watchtower all through the day,

and I am at my post all night.
 And now there is a chariot coming, a chariot with two horses”
 and a voice called back,
 “It has fallen! Babylon has fallen!
 And all the statues of its gods
 have been smashed on the ground!”
 Ah, my people, grain threshed out on the floor!
 I have only told you
 what I have heard from YHWH, the commander of armies,
 the God of Israel.
 An oracle against Edom:
 They call to me from Seir,
 “Watchman, how is the night?”
 “Watchman, how is the night?”
 The watchman said,
 “Morning has come, and night once again.
 If you want to ask, ask;
 and then return and come back.”

An angel cried in a voice of thunder, “It has fallen. Babylon the Great has fallen!” Then I heard another voice from heaven, “Come out, my people; come out of her! You must not take part in her sins!”

Her wrongs are piled up as high as heaven, and the Master has the list of them in his hand. Come out, my people, come out of her! You must not take part in her sins!

Second reading

The Value of Patience by St. Cyprian

Patience is a direction for our rescue given us by our Master and teacher: “Anyone who lasts out to the end will be saved.” And also, “If you keep hold of what I say, you will be real students of mine; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

My dear brothers and sisters, we must hold out and persevere if we are to reach the truth and freedom we have been allowed to hope for. Faith and hope are the very meaning of our being Christians; but if faith and hope are to reach their goal, patience is required.

We are not to look for glory now in the present; we are to look for future glory, as St. Paul teaches us when he says, "We are saved by hope. But hope which is seen is not hope; how can a man hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we are to wait for it in patience." Patient waiting is required if we are to become complete in what we have begun to be, and if we are to receive from God what we hope for and believe.

In another place, the same Emissary gives instructions and teaches virtuous people and people active in good deeds, as well as those who are adding to their savings in heaven through the rewards God gives them: They are also to be patient, as he says, "And so while we have time, let us do good to everyone, and especially those who belong to the family of the faith. And we should not grow tired of doing good, because we will reap the harvest of our reward at the proper time."

Paul warns us not to grow tired in our good deeds through impatience; not to be distracted or overcome by temptations and give up in the middle of our pilgrimage toward praise and glory, and so let our past good deeds count for nothing, because what we began falls short of completeness.

Finally, the Emissary, when he speaks of love, unites it with perseverance and patience. "Love," he says, "is always patient and kind; it is not jealous, not conceited, is not touchy, does not wish harm, loves everything, believes everything, hopes for everything, and puts up with everything." He shows that love can be persevering because it has learned how to put up with everything.

In another place he says, "Put up with each other lovingly, and try hard to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He shows that neither unity nor peace can be maintained unless the brothers and sisters love each other with mutual tolerance, and preserve this bond of harmony with patience.

He will finally appear; he is true to his word. Keep watching for him, because he will certainly come without delay.

A little while longer, just a very little while and the one who was promised will come. Keep watching for him, because he will certainly

come without delay.

Prayer

Our Father God, since you loved the world enough to give it your only Son to free us from the ancient power of sin and death, please help those of us who are waiting for his coming, and lead us to true freedom. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Second Sunday in Advent

First Reading

Isaiah 22.8-23

You looked on that day to the armor in the House of the Forest;
you saw the how great the damage was
to David's City;
and you collected water from the lower pool.
You counted the houses in Jerusalem,
and tore down some houses
to repair the wall.
You also made a reservoir between the two walls
for the water of the old pool.
But you did not look to its maker,
or show respect for the one who built it long ago.
And on that day, YHWH, God of armies
called for weeping and mourning,
for shaven heads and wearing sackcloth;
but instead there was fun and games,
slaughtering of steers and butchering sheep,
eating meat and drinking wine;
“Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we are to die!”
And this reached the ears of YHWH, commander of armies,
“There will be no pardon for this wrong you have done,
not till you die!” says YHWH, God of armies.
And this is what is said by YHWH, God of armies:
“Go, approach this official,

Shebna, master of the palace, and say,
 ‘Who put you here? What is your business here?
 You have made a burial-place for yourself up this high
 and carved a tomb for yourself in the rock?
 Well, YHWH will shake you out of it,
 man of power,
 he will grab you in his hand
 and roll you up into a ball and throw you
 out into the field,
 and you will die there, and the chariots you boast of
 will be the disgrace of your master’s house!’
 And then, on that day what I will do
 is call my slave Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah,
 and dress him in your robe
 and strap your belt upon him,
 and give him your authority.
 He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem
 and to Judah’s family.
 I will place the key of David
 upon his shoulder;
 and no one will lock what he opens,
 and no one will open what he locks up.
 I will fix him like a peg in a secure hole,
 in a place of honor for his father’s family.

This is what is said by the one who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, “Now I have put in front of you an open door, which no one is able to close.

“You have kept what I have said, and have not repudiated my name. And now I have put in front of you an open door, which no one is able to close.”

Second Reading *A commentary on Isaiah by Eusebius of Caesarea*

“A voice crying in the desert, ‘Ready the Master’s road! Smooth out the path for our God!’” The prophesy makes it clear that this is to be

fulfilled in the desert, not in Jerusalem; it is there that the Master's glory is to appear, and God's rescue is to be made known to all mankind.

It was in the desert that God's liberating presence was proclaimed by John, who was bathing people, and there that God's rescue was seen. The words of the prophesy were fulfilled when the Prince and his glory were able to be seen by everyone; after his bath, the sky opened up, and the Holy Spirit lighted on him in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice was heard, acting as a witness to his Son: "This is the Son I love; listen to him."

The prophesy meant that God was to come to a deserted place, inaccessible from the beginning. None of the pagans had any knowledge of God, since his holy slaves and prophets were prevented from approaching them. The voice commanded a path to be made ready for the Word of God: the rough and trackless ground is to be leveled, so that our God would find a roadway when he came. "Ready the road for the Master": The road is the proclamation of the Good News, the new report of comfort, ready to bring to all mankind the knowledge of God's liberating power.

"Climb up a high mountain, bearer of good news to Zion! Raise your powerful voice, bearer of good news to Jerusalem!" These words agree very well with the meaning of what went before. They refer appropriately to the evangelists and announce God's coming to human beings, after speaking of the voice crying in the desert. Mention of the evangelists aptly follows the prophesy about John, who bathed the people.

What does "Zion" mean if not the city previously called "Jerusalem"? This is the mountain referred to in that passage from Scripture, "Here is mount Zion, where you had your home." The Emissary says, "You have come to mount Zion." Does not this refer to the group of Emissaries, chosen from the earlier people who were circumcised?

This is the Zion, the Jerusalem, that received God's rescue. It stands high atop the mountain of God, or in other words, it is raised up high on the only legitimate Word of God. It is commanded to climb the high mountain and announce the words that rescue us. And who is the bearer of this good news if not the group of evangelists? And what does it mean

to bear the good news except to deliver the proclamation to every nation, but first of all to the cities of Judah: the coming of the Prince on earth.

The Master's herald is coming near, the one the Master referred to when he said, "No one born from woman is greater than John, who bathed the people.

Yes, this is a great prophet, and more than a prophet. This is the one the Master referred to when he said, 'No one born from woman is greater than John, who bathed the people.'"

Prayer

God of power and mercy, please open our hearts in welcome; remove what keeps us from receiving the Prince with joy, so that we can share his wisdom and become one thing in him when he comes in glory, because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 24.1-18

See how YHWH empties the earth and devastates it,
turns it upside down,
scattering those who live on it.

Then what will happen will be the same
for the people as the priests,
the slaves as the masters,
maids as their mistresses,
buyers as sellers
lenders as borrowers,
creditors as debtors.

The land will be completely emptied and totally looted,
because YHWH has pronounced his utterance.
Earth grieves and decays;

the world mourns and grows sick;
high and low become faint.
The very earth is polluted from those who live in it,
because they have violated the laws,
changed the rules,
and broken the eternal Treaty.
And that is why a curse has eaten the earth up,
and those who live there are aghast;
that is why its inhabitants burn with fever
and few of them are left.
The new wine sours, the vines are diseased,
and all the carousers are joyless.
The happy sound of tambourines is gone,
as well as happy chatter;
glad chords on the harp are silent,
and no one sings as he drinks his wine;
the alcohol the drinkers drink is bitter.
The city, in chaos, falls apart;
every house shut against entry.
In the streets there is a cry for wine,
but darkness has fallen on happiness,
and cheer has vanished from the land.
In the city, all that is left is ruin;
its gates are bent and torn down.
When this happens in the land, among the people,
they will be like a shaken olive tree,
like a gleaned vine when the harvest is over.
These few will raise their voices and sing
about the majesty of YHWH;
they will raise a shout from the sea,
“Give glory to YHWH as the morning dawns,
you there on the shores, praise the name of God YHWH of Israel;”
From the ends of the earth we have heard the songs,
“Give glory to the God of Virtue!”
But I myself said, “I am ruined! Ruined!

Oh no! No! Traitors have sold me out!
 Yes, traitors! And they have stabbed me in the back!”
 Terror of the pits, snares, and traps
 grip everyone living on the earth.
 But what will happen
 is that those who run away from the screams of terror
 will fall into the pits;
 and those who climb out of the pits
 will be caught in the snares;
 because the windows in the sky are open
 and the earth’s foundations shake.

They raise their voices in songs of praise, “May God be glorified in your teaching.”

Sing a new song to the Master: have the whole earth sing songs to the Master.

Second Reading

*The Ascent of Mount Carmel
 by St. John of the Cross*

Under the old Law, prophets and priests looked for revelations from God and visions; and they needed these, because faith did not yet have a firm foundation, and the Law of the Good News had not yet been promulgated. And so their search and God’s responses were necessary. He spoke at one time in words, visions, and revelations, and at another in signs and symbols; but no matter how he answered and what he revealed, they were the secrets of our holy faith, either partial glimpses of it, or a definite progression toward it.

But now that faith has its roots in the Prince, and the Law of the Good News has been promulgated in this time of favor, there is no need to look for him in the way that used to be done, nor for him to give these answers. By giving us, as he did, his Son, his only Word, he has in that one Word said everything. There is no need for any additional revelation.

This is the real meaning of Paul’s words to the Hebrews, when he urged them to give up their earlier ways of conversing with God, as set

out in the Law of Moses, and to put their eyes on the Prince alone: “In far-off ages, God spoke to our forefathers in fragments, in the multiform writings of the prophets; in the final age, our own day, he has spoken to us in his Son.” In effect, Paul is saying that God has spoken so completely through his own Word that he chooses to add nothing. Though he had spoken partially through the prophets, he has now said everything in the Prince. He has given us everything: his only Son.

And so anyone who wanted to ask God a question or tried to obtain some new vision or revelation from him would be committing an offense; because, instead of focusing his eyes on the Prince, he would be desiring something other than the Prince or something beyond him.

God could then answer, “‘This is the Son I love, the one who pleases me; listen to him.’ I have already said everything in my Word; fix your eyes on him alone, because in him I have revealed everything, and you will find more in him than you could ever ask for or desire.

“I came down upon him with my Holy Spirit on Mount Tabor, and said, ‘This is the Son I love, the one who pleases me; listen to him.’ You do not need new teachings or ways of learning from me; because when I spoke earlier, it was about the Prince who was to come; and when they asked for anything from me, they were only looking for and hoping for the Prince who contains everything good, as the whole teaching of the evangelists and Emissaries clearly testifies.”

A great many nations will come and say, “Let us go up to the Master’s mountain, to the home of Jacob’s God. He will teach us his ways, and we will walk along his paths.”

The Messiah, the one called the Prince, is coming, and when he comes he will teach us everything. He will teach us his ways, and we will walk along his paths.

Prayer

Master, please free us from our sins and heal us; please listen to our prayer and make us ready to celebrate the incarnation of your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Isaiah 24.19-25.5*

On that day, the earth will break apart;
 the earth will split open;
 the earth will be in convulsions;
 the earth will reel about like a drunk,
 and will totter like a flimsy hut.
 Its rebellion will weigh it down
 and it will fall and never rise again.
 And what will happen on that day
 is that YHWH will punish the heavenly army in the sky
 and the kings of the earth on the ground;
 they will be collected
 as prisoners are collected in pits;
 they will be shut up in a dungeon,
 and after a great while they will be punished.
 Then the moon will lose its luster
 and the sun grow pale,
 because YHWH of armies will reign
 on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
 glorious in the sight of his elders.
 YHWH, you are my God;
 I will tell how great you are;
 I will praise your name,
 because you have done marvels,
 and your ancient plans are fidelity and truth itself.
 Yes, you have turned the city into a pile of rubble,
 wrecked the so-well fortified city;
 the upstarts' palace will never again be a city;
 it will never be rebuilt.
 And that is why strong people will give you glory,
 and savage nations will be in awe of you,

because you have been the strength of the poor,
 a support for the downtrodden destitute,
 a refuge from storms,
 a shade from heat;
 because you put down the fury of these barbarians
 storming against the walls;
 you put down the uproar of the Gentiles
 as if with desert heat;
 like heat on the shadow of a cloud,
 the cries of the savages will be quelled.

Master, you are my God; I will tell how great you are and praise your name, because you have fulfilled your wondrous plans.

Yes, you are a poor man's refuge, and a shelter for the downtrodden destitute, because you have fulfilled your wondrous plans.

Second Reading

*The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church
 Second Vatican Council*

The Church, to which we are all called in Jesus the Prince, and in which we acquire holiness through the gift of God, will reach its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when the time comes for everything to be renewed; and the whole world, which is intimately bound up with human beings and reaches its perfection through them, will along with the human race, be perfectly restored in the Prince.

When he was lifted above the ground, the Prince drew everything to himself; as he came back to life, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his students, and through the Spirit inaugurated his Body, which is the Church, as the universal sacrament of rescue. Now as he is enthroned beside the Father, he is working unceasingly in the world to draw people to the Church and through it to join them more closely to himself, nourishing them with his own body and blood, and so giving them a share in his life of glory.

The promised renewal that we look forward to has already begun in the Prince. It continues in the sending of the Holy Spirit; and through the Spirit, it goes on developing in the Church, where we are taught by

faith about the meaning of our life on earth as well, as we bring to fulfillment—with hope in the blessings that are to come—the work that has been entrusted to us in the world by the Father, and in so doing work out our own rescue.

The end of the ages is already with us. The renewal of the world has been instituted, and cannot be revoked. In our era, it is in a true sense anticipated: the Church on earth is already sealed with genuine, if imperfect holiness. Yet, until a new heaven and a new earth are built as the residence of virtue, the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions belonging to this world of time, bears the imprint of the world that will vanish. It lives in the center of a creating that is still in pain and agony as it waits for the Son of God to be revealed in his glory.

We are waiting eagerly for the coming of our Savior, the Master Prince Jesus; he will make our insignificant bodies new again, and turn them into something like his own glorified body.

We live soberly, virtuously, and in a God-fearing way in this world as we wait in blessed hope for the glorious coming of the all-powerful God; he will make our insignificant bodies new again, and turn them into something like his own glorified body.

Prayer

All-powerful God, please help us to look forward to the glory of the birth of our Savior the Prince, whose coming is announced with joy to the ends of the earth, because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.

 ednesdāy

First Reading

Isaiah 25.6-26.6

And on this mountain

YHWH, commander of armies will make for all peoples
a feast of succulent food,

a feast of choice wines,
juicy, rich food,
and pure, fine wines.
And on this mountain he will destroy
the veil that has been thrown over every people,
and the cloth that has covered all the nations.
He will destroy death forever,
and God YHWH will dry tears from every face;
he will remove from the earth
his people's disgrace;
because this is what YHWH has spoken.
And it will be said on that day,
"Yes, this is our God;
the one we have waited for; he will save us.
This is YHWH;
the one we have waited for;
we will celebrate and shout for joy at his rescue."
Because YHWH's hand will rest on this mountain,
and Moab will be trampled under his feet
the way straw is trampled in the dump;
and he will flail his hands among them
as a swimmer flails his hands in swimming,
and bring down their arrogance
along with their deceptive practices.
He will topple
the ramparts on your fortified walls,
and tear it down to the ground, and grind it to dirt.
On that day, this is the song to be sung in the land of Judah:
"We have a strong city;
God protects us with walls and ramparts.
Open the gates
to let in a virtuous nation that acts honestly,
one whose mind is fixed on you,
because it puts its trust in you.
Trust in YHWH forever,

because in YAH, YHWH, there is eternal strength;
 and he cuts down those who elevate themselves,
 and razes soaring cities;
 He tumbles them to the ground,
 and grinds them to powder.
 And the feet of the poor,
 the steps of the indigent,
 those feet, will trample them.

I heard a voice crying from the throne, “Now God has a residence among human beings; and he will make his home with them. They will be his people, and he will be God with them.

“The Master will destroy death forever, and dry the tears from every face. They will be his people, and he will be God with them.”

Second Reading *A discourse on the psalms by St. Augustine*

God set a time for his promises and a time for their fulfillment. The time for promises was the era of the prophets, up until John who bathed the people; from John until the end is the time of fulfillment.

God, who is faithful, put himself in debt to us, not by receiving anything, but by promising so much. And a promise was not even enough for him; he chose to commit himself in writing too, as if he were making a contract with his promises. He wanted us to be able to see the way in which his promises were kept when he began to keep them. In any case, the era of the prophets was, as we have often said, the laying out of the promises.

He promised eternal rescue, eternal happiness with the angels, an immortal inheritance, endless glory, the blissful vision of his face, his holy residence in heaven, and after the resurrection from the dead, no further fear of dying. This is his final promise, so to speak, and the goal of all our efforts. When we reach it, we will not ask for anything more. But as to the way in which we are to arrive at our final goal, he has revealed this too, by his promises and by prophesy.

He promised human beings divinity, mortals immortality, sinners a return to virtue, and the poor a rebirth to glory.

But, my brothers and sisters, because God's promises seemed to human beings something impossible—equality with angels in exchange for mortality, decay, poverty, weakness, dirt and ashes—God not only made a written contract with human beings, to win their belief, but he also provided a mediator of his good faith, who was not an angel or archangel, but his only Son. Through his Son, he wanted to show us and give us the way by which he would lead us to the goal he had promised.

It was not enough for God to make his Son our guide to the way; he made him the way itself, so that you could travel with him as your leader, and on him as the way.

And so the only Son of God was to come among human beings, to take on the nature of a human being, and in this nature to be born as a man. He was to die and come back to life, to rise up into heaven, and to sit enthroned beside the Father, and to fulfill his promises among the nations; and after this, to come again, to demand now what he had asked for before, to separate those who deserve his anger from those who deserve his mercy, to carry out his threats against immoral people, and to reward the virtuous ones as he had promised.

All this had accordingly had to be prophesied, foretold, and impressed on us as an event in the future, so that we would wait for it in faith, and not discover it as a sudden, dreadful reality.

Our God will again have pity on us; he will remove our wrongdoing and bury our sins deep in the ocean.

All the prophets give evidence about him when they say that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of his sins through his name. He will remove our wrongdoing and bury our sins deep in the ocean.

Prayer

All-powerful Father, since we are waiting for the healing power of your Son the Prince, please do not let us be discouraged by our weaknesses as we prepare for his coming, and keep us unshaken in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.

T h u r s d a y

First Reading

Isaiah 26.7-21

The path virtuous folk travel is smooth;
 Yes, Paragon of Virtue,
 you smooth out the path for the virtuous.
 Yes, we have waited for you, YHWH,
 along the path of your verdicts.
 Our souls' desire is for your name,
 and to keep you in our minds.
 My own soul yearns for you all night,
 and my spirit looks for you at dawn;
 because when your verdicts are pronounced on earth,
 those who live in the world will learn what virtue is.
 Favor may be given to evil people,
 but they will not learn virtue from it;
 an evil man will still act corruptly in an honest land
 and will not see YHWH's majesty.
 YHWH, when you raise your hand before them, they will not see it;
 but they will be chagrined when they see
 your treatment of your people;
 yes, the fire destined for your enemies will eat them up.
 YHWH, you will inaugurate peace among us,
 because you are the one who performed all our deeds in us.
 YHWH, our God, we have had
 other masters over us besides you;
 but it is only by your power that we can mention your name.
 They are dead; they have no life;
 they are ghosts that cannot come out of the grave,
 because you have punished and destroyed them,
 and killed even the memory of them.
 But you have made our nation prosper, YHWH;

you have made our nation increase
 for your own glory;
 and you have stretched the frontiers of our land.
 YHWH, in their anguish, they came to see you;
 They poured out prayers when they felt your whips.
 We have been in your sight, YHWH,
 like a pregnant woman,
 who feels the pangs and cries aloud
 when the time of birth is upon her.
 We have been pregnant, in labor,
 but we have given birth to wind;
 we have managed no liberation for the earth;
 no one living on it can bring this about.
 But your dead will still live,
 and will rise up again, along with my poor corpse.
 So wake up and sing, those of you living in the dirt,
 because your dew sparkles like dew on shrubs;
 and the earth will cough up the dead.
 Come, my people, go into your rooms
 and shut your doors behind you.
 Hide, so to speak, for just a brief moment,
 until the outburst of annoyance has passed;
 because there is YHWH, coming from his place
 to punish those who live on earth for their misconduct;
 and earth will reveal the blood that is in her,
 and will cover her murder victims no longer.

Wake and sing, those of you sleeping in the dirt, because the Master's dew is a dew of light.

Many of those who sleep in the ground will waken, because the Master's dew is a dew of light.

Second Reading

Sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus

When God saw the world falling into ruin from fear, he immediately called it back to himself with love. He invited it with his grace, preserved

it in his love, and embraced it in his tenderness. When earth had become hardened in evil, God sent the flood both to punish it and set it free. He called Noah to be the father of a new era, gave him encouragement with kind words, and showed that he trusted him; he gave him advice like a father about the present catastrophe, and through his grace comforted him with hope for the future. But God did not simply issue commands; no; with Noah helping him in his work, he filled the vessel with the seeds of the future of the whole world. The sense of loving fellowship that was born here took away the fear of a slave, and mutual love could continue to preserve what the shared labor had brought about.

God called Abraham out of the pagan world, symbolically lengthening his name, and made him the father of all believers. God walked with him on his journeys, protected him in foreign countries, enriched him with earthly possessions, and honored him with conquests. He made a Treaty with him, saved him from harm, accepted his hospitality, and astonished him by giving him the offspring he had despaired of. And because he was favored with so many gifts given from the tenderness of God's love, Abraham was to learn to love God rather than fear him; and so love and not fear was what inspired his worship.

God gave Jacob strength by a dream during his escape, roused him to combat at his return, and grasped him with a wrestler's hold to teach him not to be afraid of the one who initiated the struggle, but to love him. God called Moses as a father would, and with fatherly affection invited him to become the liberator of his people.

In all the events we have been recalling, the flame of God's love made human hearts catch fire, and its intoxication overflowed into men's senses. Wounded by love, they longed to look upon God with their bodily eyes. And yet, how could our circumscribed vision attain God, whom the whole world cannot contain? But the law of love is not bothered with what will happen, or what ought to happen, or what can happen. Love does not reflect; it is unreasonable and knows no moderation. Love refuses to accept it when its goal proves impossible, and scorns every obstacle to the attainment of its object. Love destroys the lover if he cannot have what he loves; love follows its own promptings, and does not think in terms of right and wrong. Love sets desire aflame, which

impels it toward things that are forbidden.

But why go on? It is intolerable for love not to see the object of its longing. That is why whatever reward they earned was nothing to the saints if they could not see their Master. A love that desires to see God may not have reason on its side, but it is the evidence of the love of a son. It gave Moses the rashness to say, “If I have found favor in your eyes, show me your face.” It inspired the psalmist to make the same prayer: “Show me your face.” Even the pagans made their statues for this purpose; they wanted actually to see what they mistakenly worshiped.

I will comfort you in the way a mother comforts her children, says the Master; he will come to you from the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen. And you will see this, and your hearts will be full of joy.

I will bring liberation in Zion, and my glory in Jerusalem. And you will see this, and your hearts will be full of joy.

Prayer

Almighty Father, please give us the joy of your life to prepare the way for our Master the Prince; please help us to serve you and each other. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 27.1-13

On that day, YHWH, with his cruel, huge, strong sword
 will punish Leviathan, the serpent, as he crawls away—
 Leviathan, the serpent coiled to strike—
 and he will kill the dragon in the sea.
 On that day, sing to her,
 the vineyard that yields red wine.
 I, YHWH, tend it;

I water it every moment,
to keep anything from harming it,
and cultivate it night and day.
I have no rage in me;
but if I found briars and thorns
set out there in opposition to me,
I would plow right through them,
and burn them all in a pile—
unless they grasp me in my power
to sue for peace with me;
then they will have peace with me.
Those to come out of Jacob will take root there;
Israel will bud and blossom there,
and fill the face of the world with fruit.
Has God struck Israel as Israel struck their attackers?
Have they been killed as savagely as those they killed themselves?
No, you fought with moderation,
removing Israel's sin;
Blowing it away in a howling wind,
on the day the east wind blows.
And on this is how Jacob's wrongdoing will be covered over,
and this is the result of removal of his sin,
when God turns all of the stones on the altar
into chalk, ground into powder;
wooden statues and sacred poles will stand no longer.
And still the fortified city will be left abandoned,
the homes stripped and left to go wild;
Calves will feed there, and lie down there,
eating the leaves from the branches.
And when the branches wither, they will snap off,
and women will come and burn them up.
Because these people understand nothing,
and so the one who made them will have no mercy on them,
and the one who formed them will show them no favor.
And what will happen on that day

is that YHWH will thresh out his grain,
from the river valley to the wadi on Egypt's border;
and you will be gleaned one by one,
children of Israel.

That is what will happen on that day.

A huge trumpet will be blown,
and those about to die in Assyria will assemble,
with the exiles in the land of Egypt,
and will worship YHWH on Jerusalem's holy mountain.

The Master will send out his angels with a mighty trumpet blast, and they will collect his chosen people from the four winds, and from one end of the sky to the other.

They will come and worship the Master on his holy mountain in Jerusalem; and they will collect his chosen people from the four winds, and from one end of the sky to the other.

Second Reading

Treatise against Heresies, by St. Irenaeus

As the Master came into his own creation in visible form, he was sustained by his own creation, which he sustains in being himself. His obedience on the tree of the cross reversed the disobedience at the tree in Eden; and the good news of the truth announced by an angel to Mary, a virgin who under engagement to a husband, undid the evil lie that tempted Eve, a virgin married to a husband.

As a parallel to Eve, who gave in to the temptation in the words of an angel and then ran away from God after disobeying what he told her, Mary in her turn was given the good news by the words of an angel, and took God into her womb in obedience to what he told her. As Eve was tempted into disobedience to God, Mary was persuaded into obedience to God; and it was in this way that the Virgin Mary became the attorney for the defense of the virgin Eve.

The Prince gathered everything into one unit, by collecting them all into himself. He declared war against our enemy, and crushed the one who had taken us captive in Adam at the beginning; and he stomped on

his head, as God told the serpent in Genesis: “I will create enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will make a sudden attack on your head, and you will make a sudden strike at his heel.”

The one waiting in ambush for the serpent’s head is the one who was born in Adam’s form from the woman, the Virgin. This is the offspring spoken of by Paul in the letter to the Galatians: “The law of actions was in force until the offspring to whom the promise was made would come.” He shows this even more clearly in the same letter, when he said, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born from a woman.” The enemy would not have been defeated fairly if his conqueror had not been born from a woman, because it was through a woman that he gained mastery over man in the beginning, and set himself up as man’s opponent.

And that is why the Master calls himself the Son of Man: the one who renews in himself that first man from whom the race born from women was formed. Just as by a man’s defeat, our race fell into the bondage of death, so by a man’s victory, we were to rise again to life.

The angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary, who was engaged to Joseph. The light filled her with fear, but the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive and give birth to a son, and he will be called the Son of the Supreme Being.

“The Master God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And now you will conceive and give birth to a son, and he will be called the Son of the Supreme Being.”

Prayer

All-powerful God, please help us to look forward in hope to the coming of our Savior; may we live as he has taught us, and be ready to welcome him with burning love and faith. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Isaiah 29.1-8*

“Ariel, Ariel, city where David lived,
 you are doomed!
 Add one year to another,
 let the feasts come round again,
 and I will bring calamity upon Ariel;
 there will be anguish and pain.
 To me, you will be another David’s Ariel;
 I will surround you with camps,
 I will build mounds on every side of you,
 and bring out my siege engines against you.
 You will be torn down,
 and your voices will be heard out of the dirt;
 Your voices will be like a ghost’s coming from the ground,
 and your speech will be like insects chirping out of the dirt.
 The mob of your enemies
 will be as many as grains of dust;
 the throng of those you fear
 as numerous as flying chaff.
 Yes, it will all happen in an instant, suddenly;
 you will be punished by YHWH, commander of armies,
 with thunder, earthquake, roaring,
 storms and hurricanes,
 and the flames of all-consuming fire.
 The mob of nations that fight against Ariel,
 that throng fighting against her and her ramparts
 and bring calamity on her,
 will be like a dream seen in the night.
 It will be like a hungry man’s dreams,
 and there he is, eating;

but then he wakes up, and his stomach is empty.
Or when a thirsty man is dreaming,
and there he is, drinking;
but he wakes up, and he is still faint
and his soul is still thirsty.
That is how it will be with this mob of nations
who are at war with Zion.”

Do not be afraid, Jerusalem; you will not be disgraced, because the Master will come to visit you.

The crowds of those passing by, which have fought against you, will be like flying dust, because the Master will come to visit you.

Second Reading

A sermon by Blessed Isaac of Stella

The Son of God is the firstborn of a great many brothers and sisters. Even though by nature he is the only Son God ever fathered, by grace he has joined many people to himself and made them one thing with him, because “he has given the power to become children of God” to those who accept him.

He became the Son of man, and made many men sons of God by uniting them to himself by his love and power, so that they become one thing. In themselves, there are many of them because of their human ancestry; but in him they are one thing by divine rebirth.

The whole Prince, and the single Prince—the body and the head—are one and the same; they are one and the same because they were born from the same God in heaven, and to the same mother on earth. They are many sons, and yet one Son; head and parts are one Son, and yet many sons; and in the same way, Mary and the Church are one mother, and yet more than one mother; one virgin, and yet more than one virgin.

Both are mothers, and both are virgins. Each conceives by the same Spirit, without sexual desire; each gives birth to a child of God the Father, without sin. Without any sin, Mary gave birth to the Prince, the head, for the sake of his body. By forgiving every sin, the Church gave birth to the body, for the sake of its head. Each is the Prince’s mother,

but neither gives birth to the whole Prince without the cooperation of the other.

In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary; and what is said in a particular sense of the virgin mother Mary is also correctly understood in a general sense of that virgin mother, the Church. When either one is spoken of, the meaning can be understood of both of them, almost without qualification.

In a way, every Christian is believed to be a bride of God's Word, a mother of the Prince, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fecund. These words are used in a universal sense of the Church, and in a special sense of Mary, and a particular sense of the individual Christian. They are used by God's Wisdom in person, the Word of the Father.

This is why Scripture says, "I will live in the Master's inheritance." The Master's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; and in an individual sense, the Christian. The Prince lived for nine months in the tent of Mary's womb. He lives until the end of the ages in the tent of the Church's faith; and he will live forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul.

I will found my residence among you, and will not reject you; I will walk among you, and I will be your God and you will be my people.

You are the Temple of the living God, as God himself has said. I will walk among you, and I will be your God and you will be my people.

Prayer

Master, please make your glory dawn and remove our darkness; may we be revealed as children of light at the coming of your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

Isaiah 29.13-24

And so YHWH said,
“Since these people approach me with their mouths
and honor me with their lips,
but have moved their hearts far from me,
and their respect for me is just observing human rules,
I will for that reason perform a miracle
among this people:
a miracle, an amazing thing:
The wisdom of their sages will vanish
and the intelligence of their advisors will disappear.”
Those who try to bury their plans
too deep for YHWH to discover are doomed!
They do their deeds in the dark,
and say, “Can anyone see us?” and “Could anyone recognize us?”
You have turned things upside down;
Is the potter to be thought of as if he were the clay?
Is an artifact to say of its maker,
“He did not make me”?
Is the model to say to the one who formed it,
“He does not understand what he does”?
In just as short time,

Lebanon will be turned into an orchard,
 and the orchard will be thought of as a forest;
 and on that day the deaf will hear words read out of a book,
 and blind eyes will see out of their shadows and darkness;
 insignificant people will find great joy in YHWH,
 and humanity's poor will take pleasure
 in Israel's Holy God;
 because the tyrant they fear will be destroyed,
 the one who lorded it over them will be eaten up,
 and everyone looking for a chance for evil—
 those who have men condemned by their lies,
 and those who set traps at the gates for their defenders,
 and those who cheat honest folk with empty promises—
 will be cut down.
 This is what is said by YHWH, the one who redeemed Abraham, about
 the descendants of Jacob:
 "Jacob will now have nothing to be ashamed of;
 his face will no longer blanch;
 but when his descendants see
 the deeds my hands perform among them.
 They will show reverence for my name;
 they will respect Jacob's holy God,
 and be in awe of the God of Israel.
 Those whose spirits wandered off will achieve understanding,
 and those who found fault will learn the facts.

On that day, the deaf will hear what is read from a book, and blind eyes
 will see out of shadows and darkness, and the poor will find their joy in
 Israel's holy God.

Go back and tell John what you have heard and seen: the blind see,
 cripples walk, the deaf hear, and the poor have good news reported to
 them. And the poor will find their joy in Israel's holy God.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Augustine

John is the voice, but the Master is "the word who was in existence

in the beginning.” John is the voice that lasts only a short time; but from the beginning, the Prince is the Word that lives forever.

Take away the word, the meaning, and what is the voice? If there is nothing to understand, there is only a senseless sound. A voice without the word strikes the ear, but is not constructive for the heart.

Still, consider what happens at first when we try to develop our hearts. When I think about what I am going to say, the word or message is already in my heart. When I want to speak to you, I look for a way to share with your heart what is already in mine.

In my search for a way to let this message reach you, so that the word in my heart will find a place in yours too, I use my voice to speak to you. The sound of my voice brings the meaning of the word to you and then vanishes. The word which the sound has brought to you is now in your heart, and yet it is still in mine too.

When the word has been transmitted to you, does not the sound seem to say, “The word ought to grow greater, and I should grow less.” The sound of the voice has made itself heard in the service of the word and has gone away, as though it were saying, “My happiness is complete.” Let us hold on to the word; we must not lose the word that is conceived within us, in our hearts.

Do you need proof that the voice vanishes but the divine Word remains? Where is John’s Bath today? It served its purpose, and it disappeared. Now it is the Prince’s Bath we celebrate. We all believe in the Prince; our hope for rescue is in him. And this is the message the voice cried.

Because it is hard to distinguish the word from the sound, even John was thought to be the Prince. The voice was thought to be the word. But the voice acknowledged what it was, and was careful not to insult the word. “I am not the Prince,” he said, “nor Elijah, nor the Prophet.” And then at the question, “Then who are you,” he answered, “I am a voice crying in the desert, ‘Smooth the road for the Master.’”

“The voice crying in the desert” is the voice that breaks the silence. “Smooth the road for the Master,” he says, as though he were saying, “I am speaking so as to lead him into your hearts; but he does not choose to come where I lead him unless you smooth the way for him.”

“To smooth the road” means to pray well; it means thinking little of oneself. We should take our lesson from John the Bather; he is thought to be the Prince, and asserts that he is not what they think; he does not take advantage of their mistake for his own enhancement.

If he had said, “I am the Prince,” you can imagine how easily he would have been believed, since they believed that he was the Prince even before he spoke. But he did not say this; he acknowledged what he was. He pointed out clearly who he was; he lowered himself.

He saw where his rescue lay. He understood that he was a lamp, and he was afraid that it might be blown out by the wind of pride.

I must grow less and he must grow greater; the one who is coming after me was in existence before me, and I am not fit to untie his sandal straps.

I have bathed you in water; but he will bathe you in the Holy Spirit; I am not fit to untie his sandal straps.

Prayer

Dear God and Master, may those of us who are your people and look forward to the birthday of the Prince experience the joy of rescue and celebrate that feast with love and gratitude. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

And so YHWH will wait, to show you favor,
and come forward, to have mercy on you,
because YHWH is a God of justice,
and it is a privilege to wait for him.
People on Zion in Jerusalem,

Isaiah 30.18-26

you will weep no longer;
he will be kind to you at the sound of your call;
when he hears it, he will answer you.
YHWH will give you the bread you yearn for,
and the water to slake your raging thirst,
and your Teacher will no longer hide in a corner;
you will see your Teacher with your own eyes,
and you will hear a voice ring out behind you,
“This is the way; walk in it,”
when ever you turn to the right or left.
You will realize how unclean your silver-plated idols are,
and how filthy the gold you used to mold your statues;
you will throw them away as something defiled,
and say to them, “Get away from me!”
Then he will give you rain for the seeds
you plant in the ground;
and the wheat that the soil produces
will be rich and plentiful.
On that day, your cattle will graze
in spacious pastures,
and the oxen and the little donkeys
that till the ground
will eat silage
tossed to them with shovels and forks.
There will be running streams
on every mountain and hill.
On the day of the great slaughter,
when the towers fall,
the moon’s light will rival the sun’s,
and the sun will be seven times as bright,
as if seven days’ light were stored in it.
Yes, on the day YHWH bandages his people’s wounds,
he will heal the bruises left by his blows.

On that day, the Master will bandage his people’s wounds and God will

heal the bruises left by the blows from his sentence. It is a privilege to wait for him.

Wait for the Master, and act bravely; have a strong heart and be loyal to the Master; it is a privilege to wait for him.

Second Reading

*A speech on the Contemplation of God
by William of Saint Thierry*

It is a fact: only you are the Master. Your sovereignty is our rescue, because to be your slave is nothing more or less than to be saved by you. Master, rescue is your gift, and your blessing falls on your people; your rescue is nothing but receiving from you the gift of loving you or being loved by you. And that, Master, is why it was your will that the Son on the throne beside you, the man you made strong for yourself, would be called “Jesus,” or “savior,” “because he will save his people from their sins, and there is no one else to look to for rescue.” He taught us to love him by first loving us, “even to death on a cross.” By loving us and cherishing us to this degree, he incited us to love the one who had preceded them in love to the limit.

And this is obviously the reason: you loved us first so that we would love you—but not because you needed our love, but because we could not be what you created us to be, except by loving you.

You spoke in many ways and at various times to our ancestors through the prophets; and now in these final days, you have spoken to us in the Son, your Word, by whom the heavens were set in place and by the breath of whose mouth their powers came into existence.

And for you to speak in this way in your Son was to bring into the light of day the degree and kind of love you had for us, because you did not spare your own Son; you handed him over for all of us. And he too “loved us and gave himself up for us.”

And so this is your Word to us, Master: your omnipotent message: when everything was in midnight silence (that is, the depths of error), he came from his royal throne, the direful conqueror of error and the gentle emissary of love.

Everything he did and everything he said on earth, even enduring the insults, being spat on and slapped in the face, the cross and the grave, was

all you speaking to us in your Son, appealing to us by your love and arousing our love for you.

You know that this attitude could not be forced on people's hearts, my God, since you created them; it has to be evoked. This is also true for the additional reason that there is no freedom where there is coercion, and when freedom does not exist, virtue is not present either.

You wanted us to love you, then, since we could not have been saved justly if we had not loved you, and could not have loved you without your gift. And so, Master, as the emissary of your love tells us, and as we have already said, "you loved us first"; you are the first to love all of those who love you.

And so we cherish you by the affection you have planted in us. You are the one who is supremely good and the ultimate goodness. Your love is your goodness, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. From the beginning of creation, he was the one who hovered over the water—which is to say, over the wavering minds of humans—offering himself to everyone, drawing everything to himself. By his inspiration, his holy breath, and by keeping us from harm and providing for our needs, he unites God to us, and us to God.

My mercy will not leave you, and the Treaty of my peace will not change; I will make all your children learned in the Master, and they will enjoy lasting peace.

I am the Master, your God, who teaches you what is good and guides you in the path you are to walk; I will make all your children learned in the Master, and they will enjoy lasting peace.

Prayer

Master, please listen to our voices as we raise them in prayer, and let the light of the coming of your Son free us from the darkness of sin. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

Isaiah 30.27-33, 31.4-9

Now YHWH's name is coming from far off,
 burning with rage,
 with clouds lowering,
 lips spouting fury
 and his tongue like a devouring fire.
 His breath is like a flood in a ravine
 suddenly up to one's neck,
 and he will sift the nations with a sieve that destroys them,
 and the bridles in the mouths of the people
 will lead them off the path.
 YHWH will make his glorious voice heard
 and show how his arm comes down
 with raging fury and consuming fire,
 driving storms and falling hail.
 And YHWH's voice will shatter Assyria
 as he strikes it with his rod;
 and everywhere the rod hits
 in his punishment of that place,
 you will have a song
 like the one in the night of a festival,
 and your hearts will celebrate
 as if you were walking by with a flute
 toward YHWH's mountain
 up to the Rock of Israel,
 along with tambourines and harps;
 because the pyre has been there for a long time,
 ready for the king;
 it is piled wide and deep
 with a great deal of grass and wood,

and YHWH's breath, like a river of sulfur
 will set it aflame.
 This is what YHWH told me:
 "YHWH of armies will come down
 like a lion roaring,
 like a young lion standing over his prey,
 and even if a crowd of shepherds gathers against him,
 he will have no fear of their voices
 or pay attention to their noise;
 this is how he will fight for Mount Zion and its foothills.
 YHWH of armies will defend Jerusalem
 like birds circling overhead;
 and he will protect and rescue it,
 and spare and preserve it.
 Return, descendants of Israel, to the one you have so totally abandoned,
 because on that day every person will throw away his idols of silver and
 gold, the sin you fashioned with your own hands.
 Then Assyria will fall by a sword that is not human,
 and he will be eaten up by this sword that is not human;
 he will run away from the sword,
 and his young men will be impressed as laborers.
 He will run past his fortress in his panic,
 and his rulers will be in terror of his banner,"
 says YHWH
 whose fire is on Zion
 and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

The Master of armies will come down upon Mount Zion; he will protect Jerusalem and cover and rescue it like birds circling overhead.

Your song will be suitable for a night of profound holiness, and your heart will be full of joy; he will protect Jerusalem and cover and rescue it like birds circling overhead.

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Second Reading

The Imitation of Christ
By Thomas à Kempis

Humility and Peace

Do not be very concerned who is with you and who is against you; make your primary care that God is with you in everything you do. Have a good conscience, and God will defend you powerfully; no one can hurt you if God wishes to help you.

If you know how to suffer in silence, you will be certain to receive God's help. Since he knows best the time and way to set you free, abandon yourself to him, because God helps you and frees you from all confusion.

It is often good for us, and helps keep us humble, if others know our weaknesses and confront us with them. When a man belittles himself for his faults, he pleases others more easily and calms those he has made angry. God protects and frees a humble man; he loves and consoles a humble man; he shows favor to a humble man; he showers him with graces; and then, after his suffering, God raises him up to glory.

He reveals his secrets to a humble man, and in his kindness beckons the man to come to himself. When a humble man is brought into consternation, he still experiences peace, because he has a firm footing in God and not in this world. Do not think you have made any progress unless you feel that you are the most insignificant of all human beings.

Above all, keep peace within yourself, and then you will be able to create peace among others. It is better to be peaceful than learned.

A passionate man often thinks badly of a good man and easily believes the worst of him; a good and peaceful man turns everything into good.

A man who lives at peace is not suspicious of anyone; but a man who is tense and agitated by evil is troubled with all kinds of suspicions; he is never at peace with himself, and does not allow others to be at peace. He often speaks when he should be silent, and fails to say what would in fact be useful; he is clearly aware of the obligations of others, but neglects his own.

So be zealous first of all with yourself, and then you will have more justification for expressing zeal for your neighbor. You are good at

excusing and justifying your own actions, and yet you will not listen to the excuses of others; it would be more just of you to accuse yourself and excuse your brother. If you wish others to put up with you, first put up with them.

The Master leads humble people to virtue; he teaches unassuming ones his ways. Mercy and truth are the Master's ways, evidence of him to everyone who is looking for him.

Base your judgments on the facts, and have each one be merciful and forgiving to his brother. Mercy and truth are the Master's ways, evidence of him to everyone who is looking for him.

Prayer

Father of love, since you made a new creation through your Son Prince Jesus, may his coming free us from sin and renew his life within us, because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Wednesday

Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

Isaiah 31.1-3,32.1-8

Doom will fall

on those who go down to Egypt for help
and rely on horses,
and put their trust in chariots because of their number,
and in the cavalry because of its strength,
and do not look to Israel's Holy One,
or try to find YHWH.

Yes, he is the one who is wise and will bring disaster,
and will not take back what he has said;
he will come forward against this family of outlaws,

and against those who give help to these criminals
 The Egyptians are men, not God;
 their horses are material things, not spirit.
 When YHWH brings down his fist,
 the helper will fall and the one helped will collapse;
 they will all die together.
 And then a virtuous king will reign,
 and honest kings will be on the throne.
 Each will be a shelter from the wind
 and a refuge from the storm.
 They will be like rivers in the desert
 and the shadow of a rock in a parched land.
 The eyes of those looking will not grow dim,
 and the ears of those listening will hear;
 rash hearts will understand what is to be known,
 and stutterers will be able to speak clearly.
 Fools will no longer be called noble
 and cheats will not be called honorable;
 because fools speak fatuously
 and plot evil in their hearts:
 how to get away with depravity,
 to slander YHWH,
 to let the hungry go with nothing
 and deprive the thirsty of water;
 and cheats use cruel deception
 in planning their crimes
 about how to ruin the poor with their lies
 and to get the better of the indigent in the courts.
 But noble people have noble plans,
 and stand by their noble acts.

The eyes of those looking will not grow dim, and the ears of those
 listening will hear; hearts of fools will be open to knowledge.
 I will create a virtuous branch for David; he will rule as a wise king.
 Hearts of fools will be open to knowledge.

Second Reading *A Treatise against Heresies by St. Irenaeus*

There is one God, who by his word and wisdom created everything and established their order. His Word is our Master Prince Jesus, who in this final age became a human being among human beings to unite the end and the beginning, or in other words man and God.

The prophets, who received the gift of prophecy from this same Word, foretold his material coming, which brought about the union and sharing between God and man that was originated by the Father. From the beginning, the Word of God prophesied that God would be seen by humans and would live among them on earth; he would speak with his own creation and be present to it, bringing it rescue and being visible to it. He would “free us from the hands of everyone who hates us”; that is, from the universal spirit of sin, and enable us to “serve him in holiness and virtue all of our days.” Man was to receive the Spirit of God and so attain the glory of the Father.

The prophets, then, foretold that God would be seen by human beings. As the Master says himself, “It is a blessing to have a clean heart, because people of this sort will see God.” In his greatness and inexpressible glory, “no one can see God and live,” because the Father is beyond comprehension. But in his love and generosity and omnipotence, he allows even this to those who love him—that is, even to see God, as the prophets foretold. “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.”

By their own powers human beings cannot see God, yet God will be seen by humans because he wills it. He will be seen by those he chooses, at the time he chooses, and in the way he chooses, because God can do everything. He was seen in ancient times through the Spirit in prophecy; he is seen through the Son by our adoption as his children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven in his own being as the Father. The Spirit prepares us humans to receive the Son of God, the Son leads us to the Father, and the Father, freeing us from change and decay, bestows the eternal life that comes to everyone from seeing God.

In the same way as those who see light are in the light and share its brilliance, those who see God are in God and share his glory; and that glory gives them life. To see God is to share in life.

I will bring a prophet forward for them, and I will place my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command.

I am sending my own Son, the one I love; who is really the prophet who was to come into the world. He will tell them everything I command.

Prayer

Father, may the coming celebration of the birth of your Son bring us your saving help and make us ready for eternal life. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.



Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

Isaiah 32.15-33.6

In those days, the Spirit from high above
will pour over us.

Then the desert will become an orchard,
and the orchard will be thought of as a forest.

Justice will have its home in the desert
and virtue will live in the orchard.

Virtue will produce peace,
and justice will bring calm and security.

My people will live in a tranquil country,
in secure homes and quiet settlements.

It will be their privilege to plant their crops beside the streams
and let their oxen and donkeys range freely.

You are doomed, destroyer who was never destroyed,
traitor whom no one betrayed.

When you finish your destruction, you will be ruined,

and when you tire of betraying, you will be betrayed.
 YHWH, please have mercy on us; we are waiting for you.
 Please be our strength every morning,
 our rescue when we are in trouble.
 Peoples will run from the roar you make
 when you come forward in majesty, and scatter everywhere.
 Men will pick up loot as if they were gathering caterpillars;
 they will swarm over it like locusts.
 YHWH is high above us, in his throne in the sky;
 he fills Zion with justice and virtue.
 What makes her seasons last and last,
 the riches that save her, are wisdom and understanding;
 respect for YHWH is her treasure.

My people will be enthroned amid the beauty of peace, and in secure
 tents, and peace will be the harvest of virtue.

My peace is what I leave you; do not be worried or in despair. And
 peace will be the harvest of virtue.

Second Reading *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
 by the Second Vatican Council*

God, who through the Word creates everything and keeps everything
 in being, provides men with unfailing testimony to himself in creation.
 With the intention of opening up the way of rescue from above, he also
 revealed himself to our first parents from the very beginning.

After their fall, he lifted them up to hope for rescue by the promise
 of redemption, and watched over mankind with unceasing care, so that
 he could give eternal life to everyone who tries to find rescue in
 persevering in good deeds.

In his own good time, God called Abraham, to make a mighty nation
 out of him. After he patriarchs, he taught his nation through Moses and
 the prophets to acknowledge himself alone as the living and true God,
 and provident father and just judge, and to look forward to the promised
 Savior. So, through the ages, he prepared a way for the Good News.
 After speaking “at various times and in different ways through the

prophets, God has finally spoken to us in these days through the Son.”

He sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens everyone, to make his home among human beings and to make known to them what is innermost in God. Prince Jesus, the Word become flesh, sent as “a man to men, speaks the words of God,” and brings to perfection the saving work that the Father gave him to do.

To see him is also to see the Father. By his whole presence and self-revelation, by words and deeds, by signs and miracles, especially by his death and glorious return to life out of death, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth, he completes revelation and brings it to perfection, sealing by divine testimony its message the God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us to eternal life.

The Christian dispensation, because it is the new and definitive Treaty, will never go out of existence, and no new public revelation is any longer to be looked for before the manifestation in glory of our Master Prince Jesus.

Your eyes will look upon your teacher; your ears will hear the warning: this is the path; follow it.

The Master, your God, will bring forward a prophet from among your tribe and from among your relatives. Your ears will hear the warning: this is the path; follow it.

Prayer

Master, since our sins bring us unhappiness, please listen to our prayer for courage and strength, and may the coming of your Son bring us the joy of rescue. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Note: If after December 16, go to the date.

First Reading

Isaiah 33.7-24

Listen: the men of Ariel are calling in the streets,
 and the messengers of Shalem are weeping bitter tears.
 The highways are abandoned;
 travelers have left the paths;
 treaties are broken, their terms ignored,
 and yet no one gives it a thought.
 The country is sick with grieving;
 Lebanon is withering with shame;
 Sharon is like a prairie,
 and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare.
 “Now I will come forward,” says YHWH.
 “Now I will be elevated, now I will be raised high.
 You conceive hay and give birth to straw;
 and my spirit will eat you up like a fire.
 The peoples will think they are in a limekiln,
 or are brushwood cut down for burning on the fire.
 Listen, those of you far off, to what I have done,
 and those near, recognize my power!”
 On Zion, sinners are in dread;
 quaking seizes the unbelievers:
 “Can anyone live in this conflagration?
 Can anyone survive these eternal flames?”
 One who does what is virtuous and speaks honestly,
 who scorns what is gained from oppression,
 and brushes his hands from contact with bribes,
 who plugs his ears not to hear of bloodshed
 and closes his eyes not to see evil;
 he is the one whose home will be on the mountaintop;
 his fortress will be among the rocky cliffs,

and his food and drink will be in steady supply.
 Your eyes will see a king in his splendor;
 they will look over a vast territory.
 Your mind will ponder the terror:
 "Where are the important people? Where are the great ones?
 Where is the one who counted the towers?"
 You will no longer look for help to aliens,
 to people whose speech you cannot follow,
 babbling a language you cannot understand.
 Look to Zion, the city where our festivals are held;
 let your eyes see Jerusalem
 as a tranquil home, a tent that will not be struck,
 with pegs never to be pulled up,
 or any of its ropes cut down.
 Yes, YHWH will be there with us, in majesty;
 yes, YHWH, our judge, YHWH our legislator,
 YHWH, our king, is the one who will save us.
 In a place of rivers and wide brooks
 on which no boat is rowed,
 where no tall ship passes,
 the rigging hangs limp
 and cannot hold up the mast
 or keep the sails spread out.
 Then the blind will divide enormous loot,
 and the lame will carry off the booty.
 No one who lives there will say, "I am sick";
 the people who have this home will have their guilt forgiven.

The Master is our judge, the Master is our legislator, the Master is our king, and he will come to save us himself.

The Master has taken command; the earth is to celebrate it, and the many shores are to be full of joy. He will come to save us himself.

Second Reading *A Discourse on the Psalms by St. Augustine*
 "I cried out in the anguish of my heart." There is a hidden anguish

which is inaudible to human beings; yet when a man's heart is so taken up with some particular concern that the hurt inside spills over into his voice, one looks for the reason. One will say to oneself, perhaps this is what causes his anguish, or perhaps that has happened to him. But who can be certain of the cause except God, who hears and sees his pain? And so the psalmist says, "I cried out in the anguish of my heart." If humans hear at all, they usually hear only the physical groans, and know nothing of the anguish of the heart which produces them.

Then who is it who knows the cause of a man's groans? "All my desire is before you." No, it is not apparent to other human beings, because they cannot understand the heart; "but all my desire is before you." If your desire is evident to the one who is your Father and who sees what is hidden, he will answer you.

You see, the desire of your heart is itself your prayer. And if the desire is constant, so is your prayer. The Emissary Paul had a purpose in saying, "Pray without ceasing." Are we then constantly to be on bended knees, lying prostrate, or lifting up our hands? Is this what is meant by saying "Pray without ceasing"? Even if we acknowledge that we do pray in this way, I do not believe we can do this all the time.

But there is another, interior, kind of prayer that does not cease: the prayer of the heart. Whatever else you may be doing, if you simply fix your desire on God's Sabbath rest, your prayer will be unending. And so, if you want to pray without ceasing, do not cease to desire.

The continuousness of your desire will itself be the ceaseless voice of your prayer; and that voice of your prayer will be silent only when your love ceases. Who are the silent ones, after all? Those of whom it is said, "Because evil is plentiful, the love of many people will grow cold."

The chilling of love means that the heart is silent, while love on fire is the outcry of the heart. If your love is unending, you are always calling; if you are always calling, you are always desiring; and if you desire, you are recalling your eternal rest in the Master.

"And all my desire is before you." What if the desire of our heart is before him, but not our groans? But how is that possible, since the groans are the voicing of our desire? That is why it is said, "My groans are not hidden from you." They may be hidden from human beings, but

they are not hidden from you. Sometimes God's slave seems to be saying in his humility, "My anguish is not hidden from you." At other times, he seems to be laughing. Does that mean that the desire of his heart has died inside him? If the desire is there, the groans are there also; even if human beings fail to hear them, they never stop ringing in the ears of God.

We are the Prince's pilgrim people, journeying until we reach our homeland, singing on the way as we eagerly wait for the fulfillment of our hope. Because if a person has hope, even though his tongue is still, he is always singing in his heart.

But a person who has no hope, no matter what clamor and shouts he makes to be heard by human beings, is speechless in the presence of God. Because if a person has hope, even though his tongue is still, he is always singing in his heart.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, please guide us with your love as we await the coming of your Son, and keep us faithful so that we will be helped through life and brought to rescue. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Note: From this point on, everything comes from the date.



December 17

*First Reading**Isaiah 45.1-13*

This is what is said by YHWH to Cyrus, whom I anointed,
 whose right hand I hold,
 subduing nations before him
 and making kings run to serve him,
 opening doors before him
 and leaving gates unbarred.
 I will go before you
 and level the mountains;
 I will shatter doors even of bronze
 and snap the iron bars.
 I will give you treasures from the darkness
 and riches that have been hidden,
 so that you will know that I am YHWH,
 the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.
 It is for the sake of my servant Jacob
 and of Israel, whom I chose,
 that I called you by your name
 and gave you a title, though you were not aware of me.
 I am YHWH and there is no one else;
 there is no God except me.
 I am the one who is arming you, though you are unaware of me,
 so that toward the sunrise and sunset
 people will know that there is no one besides me.
 I am YHWH, and there is no one else;
 I make the light and create darkness;
 I make prosperity and create hardship;
 I, YHWH, do all of this.
 Virtue is to descend, heavens, like dew from above;
 the skies are to distill it like gentle rain.
 Earth is to open and rescue to bud,
 and virtue must also burgeon.

I, YHWH, have created this.
 Anyone who fights with his Maker is doomed;
 he is a piece of pottery among earth's fragments of clay.
 Does the clay dare say to its molder, "What are you doing?"
 Or "What you are making has no hands"?
 One who asks a father "What are you fathering?" is to be pitied,
 or a woman, "What are you giving birth to?"
 This is what is said by YHWH,
 the Holy One of Israel, their maker:
 "You presume to question me about my children
 or prescribe for me the work my hands are to do?
 I was the one who made the earth
 and created mankind upon it;
 it was my hands that spread out the sky,
 and arranged all their army.
 I was the one who aroused a man so that virtue would triumph;
 and I make all his paths level.
 He will rebuild my city
 and let my exiles go free
 without price or ransom,"
 says YHWH of armies.

The sky is to distill gentle showers and the clouds rain the Virtuous Person, and the earth is to produce a Savior.

Master, please send the Lamb, the ruler of the earth, from the Rock in the desert to the mountain of daughter Zion. And the earth is to produce a Savior.

Second Reading

A letter by St. Leo the Great

To speak of our Master, the son of the blessed virgin Mary, as true and perfect man is of no value to us if we do not believe that he is descended from the line of ancestors set out in the Good News. Matthew's report begins by setting out "the genealogy of Prince Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham," and then traces his human descent by bringing his ancestral line down to his mother's husband Joseph. On the

other hand, Luke traces his parentage backward step by step to the actual father of mankind, to show that both the first and last Adam share the same nature.

No doubt the Son of God in his omnipotence could have taught and sanctified human beings by appearing to them in something similar to human form as he did to the patriarchs and prophets, when, for instance, he engaged in a wrestling contest or entered into conversation with them, or when he accepted their hospitality and even ate the food they set before him.

But these appearances were only symbolic precursors, signs that mysteriously foretold the coming of the one who would take a true human nature from the stock of the patriarchs who had preceded him. It was no mere figure, then, that fulfilled the mystery of our being brought into conformity with God, as was arranged from all eternity.

The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the Virgin, nor had the power of the Supreme Being overshadowed her, so that within her spotless womb Wisdom could build itself a house, and the Word could become flesh. The divine nature and the nature of a slave were to be united in one person, so that the Creator of time would be born in time, and the one through whom everything came into being would be produced among these creatures.

That is, unless the new man, by being made “in the image of sinful humanity,” had taken on himself the nature of our first parents, unless he had stooped to be one in reality with his mother while sharing his Father’s reality, and, since he alone was free from sin, united our nature to his, the whole human race would still be held captive under the dominance of Satan. The Conqueror’s victory would have been of no use to us if the battle had been fought outside our human condition.


But through this wondrous mixing, the mystery of new birth shone upon us, so that through the same Spirit by whom the Prince was conceived and born, we too would be born again in a spiritual birth; and for this reason the reporter of the Good News declares the faithful to have been “born from God, not from blood or material desire or human choice.”

Note: From this day forward, the so-called "O" antiphons of the Magnificat replace the responsory at Matins in this breviary.

Ah, Wisdom, holy Word of God, since you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care, please come and show your people the way to their rescue.

Prayer

Father, creator, and redeemer of mankind, since you issued the decree and your Word, become man, was born from the Virgin Mary, may we come to share in the divinity of the Prince who lowered himself so far as to share in our human nature, because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ecember 18

First Reading

Isaiah 46.1-13

Baal is bowing and Nebo stooping,
 as their idols ride upon beasts and cows;
 they have to be carried upon shoulders
 and serve as burdens to tired backs,
 and then they stoop and bow together,
 unable to save those who are carrying them
 as they too go into captivity.
 Listen to me, family of Jacob,
 and all of you left from the house of Israel,
 my burden since you were born,
 those I carried from your infancy.
 I am the same even in your old age,
 and even when your hair is gray I will carry you;
 and I am the one who has done this, and I will keep on;
 and I will be the one who carries you to safety.
 Who would you compare me with as if he were my equal,
 or match me with, as though we were alike?

There are those who pour the gold out of their purses
and weigh out silver on their scales,
and then hire a goldsmith to make it into a "god"
that they fall down and worship.
They lift it on their shoulders and carry it,
and when they set it down, it stays there
and does not move from the spot.
And even when they call to it, it does not answer,
and rescues no one from his troubles.
So remember this, and be firm;
bear it carefully in mind, you rebels.
Remember what once happened, long ago.
I am God, and there is no one else who is;
I am God, and there is nothing like me.
I foretell the result at the beginning;
I speak of what is not yet done before it happens.
I say that my plan will remain firm;
I fulfill every goal I have.
I call a bird of prey from the east,
from a distant land out there, to carry out my plan.
Yes, I have spoken it, and I will fulfill it;
I have planned it, and I will do it.
Listen to me, you cowards,
who seem far from virtue's victory:
I am bringing my virtue to you; it is not far off,
and my rescue will not delay;
I will place safety within Zion
and give Israel my glory.

Listen to me, you cowards, who are far from virtue. I will bestow rescue
upon Zion and give my glory to Israel.

I am bringing my virtue close to you, and it will not delay, and my
rescue will not be late. I will bestow rescue upon Zion and give my glory
to Israel.

*Second Reading**A Letter to Diognetus*


No human being has ever seen God or known him, but God has revealed himself to us through faith, which is the only thing by which it is possible to see him. God, the Master and maker of everything, who created the world and regulated it, not only loved us human beings but was patient with us. That is how he has always been, is now, and always will be: kind, good, free from anger, and truthful; in fact he and he alone is good.

He devised a plan, a great and wonderful plan, and shared it only with his Son. As long as he let it be secret, and kept his own wise purposes to himself, he seemed to be neglecting us, and to have no concern for us. But when he revealed and made public through the Son he loved what he had prepared from the very beginning, he gave us all at once gifts the like of which we could never have dreamed of, including the sight and knowledge of himself.

When God had made all his plans in consultation with his Son, he waited until a later time, and allowed us to follow our caprices, to be swept away by raging passions, and to be led astray by pleasure and desire. Not that he was pleased by our sins; he merely tolerated them; not that he approved of that sinful time, it is that he was planning this era of holiness. When we had demonstrated that we did not deserve life, his goodness was to make us fit for it; when we had made it clear that we could not enter God's kingdom under our own power, we were to be given the ability to do so by the power of God.

When our depravity had reached its peak, it became evident that the punishment was near in the shape of suffering and death. The time then came for God to make known his kindness and power; how immeasurable is God's generosity and love! He did not show hatred for us or take revenge; he was patient with us, he put up with us, and in pity took our sins upon himself; he gave his own Son as the price of our redemption, and the holy one redeemed the corrupt, the virtuous one redeemed the vicious, the incorruptible one those that decay, the immortal one redeemed us mortals. What else could have covered over our sins but his sinlessness? Where else could we in our evil and sinful condition, have found the means of holiness except only in the Son of God?

How wonderful a transformation; how mysterious a design; how inconceivable a blessing! The corruption of many, many people is covered up in the Holy One, and the holiness of this One sanctifies sinners.

 Oh, sacred Master of ancient Israel, since you showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the holy law on Mount Sinai, please come, and hold out your mighty hand to set us free.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, please renew us by the coming feast of your Son and free us from our slavery to sin. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ecember 19

First Reading

Isaiah 47.1,3-15

“Come down and sit in the dirt,
virgin daughter, Babylon;
Sit on the ground, dethroned,
daughter of the Chaldeans;
you will no longer be called
refined and delicate.
I will have my vengeance,
and yield to no plea,”
says our redeemer,
whose name is YHWH of armies,
Israel’s Holy One.
“Go into the dark and sit there in silence,
daughter of the Chaldeans;
you will no longer be called
mistress and ruler of kingdoms.
I was angry at my people

and profaned my heritage,
and handed them over to you;
but you showed them no mercy,
and put a heavy harness
upon old men.
You said, 'I will last for ever,
and always be ruler and mistress.'
But you did not care about these things;
you paid no attention to their result.
So listen to this now, you prostitute
sitting secure upon your throne,
saying to yourself,
'I am the one; there is no one else!
I will never be a widow
or endure losing my children.'
Both of these disasters will fall on you
all of a sudden, in a single day:
total bereavement and widowhood
will come upon you
because of all your witchcraft
and the great number of your spells;
because you felt secure in your evil
and said, 'No one can see me.'
Your wisdom and knowledge
led you astray,
and you said to yourself,
'I am the one; there is no one else!'
But disaster will happen to you
that you did not know how to predict;
calamity will fall upon you
that you cannot avoid.
There will suddenly come upon you
ruin that you do not expect.
So now, keep up your witchcraft
and your many spells;

perhaps you can look to them for help;
 perhaps you can strike terror with them.
 You wore yourself out with all your seances
 that you worked at from your youth;
 then have the astrologers save you,
 the stargazers who cast predictions at every new moon
 and told you what would happen to you.
 See them; they are like subble,
 and fire is burning them up.
 They cannot save themselves
 from the spreading flames;
 this is no glowing hearth,
 no fire to sit by.
 And that is the service you receive from your wizards
 with whom you worked from your youth;
 each one wanders off by himself,
 with no one to save you.

Be glad, heavens, and celebrate this, earth; call out your praise, mountains; because the Master will pity his poor.

Our Redeemer, the Master, God Sabaoth is his name, Israel's Holy One; because the Master will pity his poor.

Second Reading *A Treatise against Heresies by St. Irenaeus*

God is the glory of human beings; a human being is the receptacle of God's action and all his wisdom and power.

God is revealed in his conduct with human beings in the same way as a doctor is evaluated by his care for the sick. That is Paul's reason for saying, "God has made the whole world prisoner to unbelief so that he would be able to have mercy on everyone." He was speaking of man, who was disobedient to God, and exiled from immortality, and then found mercy and received the adoption brought by the Son of God.


If the human race, without being conceited or arrogant, has a correct belief about what is created and their divine Creator, who holds everything in his power after having given it being; and if it perseveres in

God's love and in obedience and gratitude to him, it will receive even greater glory from him. It will be a glory which will grow brighter and brighter until the human race takes on the likeness of the one who died for it.

He was the one who took on the likeness of sinful flesh, to condemn sin and rid matter of sin, as something now condemned. He wanted to invite mankind to take on his own likeness, setting the human race up as an imitator of God, and establishing mankind in a way of life in obedience to the Father that would lead to the vision of God, and endowing it with the power to receive the Father. He is the Word of God, who made his home among human beings and became the Son of Man, to open the way for man to receive God, for God to take residence with man, as the Father willed.

And this was the reason "the Master himself gave" as the sign of our rescue the one who was born "to the Virgin, Emmanuel." It was "the Master who saved them himself," because in themselves they had no power to be saved. This is why Paul speaks of human weakness, and says, "I know that no good is lodged in my matter." He means that the blessing of our rescue comes from God, not from us. Again, he says, "I am a worthless wreck! Can anyone save me from this body doomed to die?" Then he speaks of a liberator, thanks to our Master, Prince Jesus.

Isaiah says the same thing. "Grow strong, feeble hands; take courage, weak knees; become firm, faint hearts! Do not be afraid; yes, God is judgment, and he will pay them. He will come and save us himself." He means that we could only be saved with God's help, not by ourselves.

 h, flower from Jesse's stem, you have sprouted as a sign for every people; kings stand silent in your presence, the nations bow down in worship before you. Please come and do not let anything keep you from helping us.

Prayer

Father, since you show the world the radiance of your glory in the coming of the Prince, born to the Virgin, please give us true faith and

love so that we can celebrate the mystery of God become human. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

eceember 20

First Reading

Isaiah 48.1-11

Listen to this, family of Jacob,
 who are called by Israel's name,
 and descended from the stock of Judah,
 you people who swear by YHWH's name
 and call upon Israel's God
 without sincerity or honesty,
 though you take your name from the holy city
 and put your trust in Israel's God,
 whose name is YHWH of armies.
 Long ago, I foretold things about the past;
 the prophesy issued from my mouth, and I let you hear it,
 because I know that you are stubborn,
 and your neck has iron for muscles
 and your forehead is bronze.
 I foretold events from long, long ago,
 and let you hear of them before they happened,
 so that you would not say, "My idol did this,
 my statue, the image I molded gave these commands."
 And now that you have heard me, look at all this;
 can you deny it?
 From now on I will announce new things to you:
 secret events that you did not know.
 They come into being from not long ago,
 and you did not hear of them beforehand,
 so that you cannot claim to have known them;
 you did not hear of them, or understand them;

they did not reach your ears before now.
 Yes, I know you are completely false,
 and are rebels from the day you were born.
 I am keeping my anger in check for my own name's sake,
 and because of my fame, I am holding it back from you,
 or I would destroy you.
 You see, I have refined you like silver
 and proved you in the furnace of suffering.
 It is for my sake, for my own sake, that I do this;
 why should I put up with profanation?
 I will give my glory to no one else.

I have proved you in the furnace of suffering; and it is for my sake, for my own sake, that I do this, so that I will not be blasphemed. I will give my glory to no one else.

In a moment of outrage, I hid my face from you for a while, and suddenly I took action and brought them into existence; but in my eternal mercy, I had pity on you. I will give my glory to no one else.

Second Reading

*A Homily in Praise of the Virgin Mother
 by St. Bernard*

You heard, Virgin, that you will become pregnant and give birth to a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel is waiting for an answer; it is time for him to return to God, who sent him. And we are also waiting, my Lady, for a word of pity from you; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily on us.

The price of our rescue is offered to you; we will be set free at once if you agree. In the eternal Word of God we all came into existence—and now we die. In your brief answer, we are to be remade so that we can be recalled to life.

Adam, in tears along with his grieving family, begs this of you, loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise; Abraham is begging it, and David is begging it. All the other patriarchs who are your ancestors are asking you for it, living over in the country under death's shadow. This is what the whole earth is waiting for, as it is prostrate at your feet; and it is right for

it to do so, because on your word depends comfort for those who are miserable, ransom for captives, freedom for the condemned, and, in fact, rescue for all the descendants of Adam, the whole of your race.

Please give a quick answer, Virgin. Reply at once to the angel, or rather to the Master through the angel. Answer with just a word, and accept the Word of God. Speak your own word and conceive the divine Word. Breathe an ephemeral word, and embrace the eternal Word.

Why are you hesitating? Why are you afraid? Believe, praise God, and accept it. Humility should be bold, modesty should be confident. This is no time for virginal naivete to forget good judgment; do not forget, prudent Virgin, in this one thing to be presumptuous. Though modest silence is pleasant, obedient speech is now more essential. Open your heart to faith, blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, and your womb to the Creator.

Now the one all the nations desire is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass on because of your hesitation, you would then begin looking for him all over again, to try to find the One your soul loves. Come forward, hurry, open yourself! Come forward in faith, hurry in devotion, open yourself in praise and gratitude. "I am but the Master's little slave," she says, "let it happen to me as you say."



h, Key of David, royal Power of Israel, controlling at your will the gate of heaven; please come and break down the prison walls of death for those who live in darkness and death's shadow, and lead your people to freedom.

Prayer

God of love and mercy, please help us follow the example of Mary and always be ready to do your will; at the message of an angel, she welcomed your eternal Son and, filled with the light of your Spirit, she became the Temple of your Word, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

December 21

Peter Canisius, Priest

Born in Nijmegen, Holland, 1521. He studied at Cologne, entered the Society of Jesus, and was ordained in 1546. He worked in Germany for many years to strengthen the Catholic faith. The *Catechism* is the best known of his books. Died in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1597

First Reading

Isaiah 48.12-21, 49.9-13

This is what is said by YHWH:

“Listen to me, Jacob,

Israel, the one I named.

I am the one who is first; I,

and I am also the one who is last.

Yes, my hand laid the earth’s foundation,

and my right hand spread out the sky.

When I call them

they come immediately into being.

All of you gather and listen.

Did any one of you foretell this?

YHWH’s friend will do his will

against Babylon and Chaldea’s descendants.

I myself have spoken; I have called him,

I have brought him here, and his way is successful.

Come near me and listen to this.

I did not speak it cryptically from the beginning,

and at the time it happens, I am present;

‘YHWH and his Spirit has sent me now.’”

This is what is said by YHWH, your redeemer,

Israel’s Holy One:

“I, YHWH, your God,

am teaching you what is good for you,

and leading you along the path you should travel.

If you were to pay attention to my commandments,

your prosperity would be like a river,
 and your justification like the waves on the ocean;
 your descendants would be like the sand,
 and those born to you like its grains,
 their names never cut off
 or erased from my presence.
 Go on out of Babylon, run from Chaldea!
 Proclaim this with shouts of joy; make it known;
 publish it to the ends of the earth, and say,
 'YHWH has redeemed his slave Jacob.
 They were not thirsty
 when he led them through the desert;
 he set water flowing from a rock for them;
 he split the rock, and water gushed out.'
 They will find pasture along the roads;
 their feeding grounds will sprout on every bare hill.
 They will not feel hunger or thirst,
 and the hot wind or sun will not strike them;
 because the one who has mercy on them will be their leader
 and will guide them to springs.
 I will cut roads through all my mountains
 and level off my highways.
 Now from far off people are coming;
 see them, from the north and the west,
 and from the land of Syene."
 Sing, heavens,
 and celebrate, earth!
 Break into song, mountains!
 Because YHWH has comforted his people,
 and will have mercy on those who are suffering.

Sing, heavens, and celebrate, earth; break into song, mountains, because the Master is coming; and he will show mercy to his poor.

In his days, virtue will flower and peace will be plentiful; and he will show mercy to his poor.

*Second Reading**A Commentary on Luke, by St. Ambrose*

When the angel revealed his message to the Virgin Mary, he gave her a sign to win her trust; he told her of the motherhood of an old, sterile woman, to show that God can do everything that he wishes.

When she heard this, Mary left for the hill country. She did not disbelieve what God said; she felt no uncertainty about the message, or doubt about the sign; she went with a zealous purpose, with a dutiful conscience, and was hurrying in happiness.

Since she was filled with God, where would she hurry to but the high country? The Holy Spirit does not proceed by slow, painful efforts. And the blessings of her comfort and the Master's presence are quickly made clear: "as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit."


Notice the contrast and the choice of words. Elizabeth is the first to hear Mary's voice, but John is the first to be aware of grace. She hears with physical ears, but he leaps for joy at the meaning of the mystery. She is aware of Mary's presence, but he is aware of the Master's; the woman is aware of the woman's presence, and the forerunner is aware of the pledge of our rescue. The women speak of the grace they have received, but the children are active in secret, unfolding the mystery of love with the help of their mothers, who prophesy by the spirit of their sons.

The child leaps in the womb; the mother is filled with the Holy Spirit, but not before her son. Once the son has been filled with the Holy Spirit, he fills his mother with the same Spirit. John leaps for joy, and the spirit of Mary bursts out with joy in her turn. When John leaps for joy, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, but we know that though Mary's spirit is bursting with joy, she does not need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Her Son, who is beyond our understanding, is active in his mother in a way beyond our understanding. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit after conceiving John, while Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit before conceiving the Master. Elizabeth says, "You are extraordinary because you believed."

You are also extraordinary because you have heard and believed. A soul that believes both conceives and gives birth to the Word of God and acknowledges what he has done.

Mary's soul ought to be in each of you, so that you will be full of the Master's magnificence. Her spirit should be in each of you, so that you will burst with joy in the Master. The Prince has only one material mother, but we all give birth to the Prince in faith. Every soul receives the Word of God if it only keeps itself pure and stays clean and free from sin, with its modesty undefiled. The soul that succeeds in this is full of the Master's magnificence, just as Mary's soul was full of the Master's magnificence, and her spirit was bursting with joy in God, her Savior.

We read in another place, "Show how magnificent the Master is with me." The Master is made magnificent, not because the human voice can add anything to God, but because he becomes magnificent within us. The Prince is the visible counterpart of God, and if the soul does what is right and holy, it is full of the magnificence of that image of God, in whose image it was created; and in being full of the magnificence of the image of God, the soul has a share in its greatness and is lifted up to the sky.

h, radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of virtue; please come and shine on those whose home is darkness and death's shadow.

Prayer

Master, please listen to the prayers of your people, and may those of us who celebrate the birth of your Son as a human being find joy in the gift of eternal life when he comes in glory, because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Third Reading

Writings of St. Peter Canisius

Before he set out for Germany—he is correctly called the second apostle of that country—St. Peter Canisius received the apostolic blessing, and underwent a profound spiritual experience. He describes it in these words:

Eternal high priest, in your boundless goodness you allowed me to take advantage of the results and confirmation of that blessing to your Emissaries, those to whom people go on pilgrimage to the Vatican and

who work wonders there under your guidance. It was there that I experienced great consolation and the presence of your grace, offered to me through these great intercessors. They too gave their blessings, and confirmed the mission to Germany; they seemed to promise their good will to me as an Emissary to that country. You know, Master, how strongly and how often you committed Germany to my care on that very day; I was to continue to be concerned for it afterwards; I was to desire to live and die for it.

Finally, it was as if you opened the heart in your supremely sacred body to me; it seemed to see it right before my eyes. You told me to drink from this fountain; that is, you invited me to draw the water of my rescue from your source, my Savior. I was extremely eager for streams of faith, hope, and love to flow into me from that spring; I was thirsty for poverty, chastity, and obedience. I asked to be made completely clean by you, to be dressed by you, and to be made gleaming by you.

So after daring to approach your supremely loving heart and to slake my thirst in it, I received a promise from you of a garment made of three parts, which were to cover my soul in its nakedness and to belong particularly to my religious profession; they were peace, love, and perseverance. With the protection of this garment of rescue, I was confident that I had all I needed, and everything would be successful and give you glory.

When a teacher of the law becomes a student of heaven's kingdom, he is like the head of a family who is able to take from his storeroom treasures new and old.

Wisdom makes its home in a discriminating heart, and it can even teach those who are foolish. He is like the head of a family who is able to take from his storeroom treasures new and old.

Prayer

Master, since you gave St. Peter Canisius the wisdom and courage to defend the Catholic faith, may everyone who is searching for the truth have the happiness of finding you by the help of his prayers, and may everyone who believes in you be loyal in professing their faith. We make

this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



December 22

First Reading

Isaiah 49.14-50.1

“But Zion said, ‘YHWH has abandoned me,
and my Master has forgotten me.’
Can a woman forget her nursing child
and not feel sympathy with the son who came from her womb?
Yes, they may forget;
but I will not forget you;
You see, I have written you into the palms of my hands;
your walls are constantly in my presence.
Your children will hurry to rebuild you,
and those who tore you down and wrecked you
will leave you.
Raise your eyes, look around, and see;
they are all gathering to come to you.
As I live,” says YHWH,
you will deck yourselves out with them
as you would jewelry,
and fasten them about you
as if you were a bride.
You see, your devastated and ruined places
and the land where you were wrecked
will now be too small for its population,
and those who swallowed you will be far off.
The children you will have
after you lost the others
will again say in your ears,
‘This place is too small for me;
give me a place to live in.’

And then you will say in your heart,
 ‘Who is the father of these children,
 since I have lost mine, and am abandoned,
 a captive, wandering from one place to another.
 Who has raised them?
 I was left there, alone,
 and so where do these come from?’”
 This is what is said by God YHWH:
 “Now I will lift my hand and swear to the nations
 and set up my standard before the peoples;
 they will bring you your sons in their arms,
 and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.
 Kings will be foster fathers for you,
 and their queens will be their wetnurses;
 they will bow to you, with their faces on the ground,
 and lick the dust at your feet.
 And then you will know that I am YHWH,
 and that those who wait for me will not be disappointed.”
 This is what YHWH says:
 “Can loot be taken from a warrior,
 or captives removed from a powerful man?
 Yes, captives can be taken from a warrior
 and loot rescued from a powerful man,
 because I will fight with those who fight you,
 and I will save your children.
 I will make those who oppress you eat the meat of their own bodies,
 and they will be as drunk on their blood as on sweet wine;
 and everything material will know
 that I, YHWH, am your Savior;
 that Jacob’s Powerful One is your redeemer.”
 This is what YHWH says:
 “Where is the divorce decree
 that I gave to separate from your mother?
 Or to what creditor did I sell you to?
 You have been sold for your disobedience

and your mother was divorced for your crimes.

Can a mother forget her nursing child and not feel sympathy with the son that came from her womb? Yes, she can forget, but I will never forget you, says the Master.

My father and mother neglected me, but you have taken me in your arms, Master. Yes, she can forget, but I will never forget you, says the Master.

Second Reading *A Commentary on Luke by Venerable Bede*

“Mary said, ‘My soul is full of the Master’s magnificence, and my spirit is bursting with joy in God, my Savior.’”

The Master has elevated me by a gift so great, so unheard of, that language is useless in describing it, and the depths of love in my heart can hardly grasp it. And so I offer all the powers of my soul in praise and gratitude; and as I contemplate his greatness, which knows no limits, I gladly surrender my whole life, my senses and my intellect, because my spirit is bursting with joy in the eternal deity of that Jesus, that Savior, whom I have conceived in this world of time.

“The God of Power, the one whose very name is holy, has done tremendous things in me.”

Mary looks back to the beginning of her song, where she said, “My soul is full of the Master’s magnificence.” Only a soul for whom the Master in his love has done tremendous things can proclaim his greatness with fitting praise and encourage those who share her desire and intention, and say, “Join me in proclaiming the Master’s magnificence; we should tell how great his name is together.”

Those who know the Master and refuse to declare his greatness and the holiness of his name to the limit of their powers “will be called the most insignificant in the Kingdom of Heaven.” His name is called holy because in the sublimity of his unique power, he surpasses every creature and is far removed from everything he has made.

“He has given support to his servant Israel, because he has remembered his merciful promise.”

In a beautiful phrase, Mary calls Israel the Master’s servant. The


Master came to his help to save him; Israel is an obedient and humble servant, in the words of Hosea: "Israel was a slave, and I loved him."

Those who refuse to be humble cannot be saved; they cannot say with the prophet, "Yes, God is coming to help me; the Master is the one who helps my soul." But anyone "who makes himself humble like a little child is greater in the Kingdom of Heaven."

"The promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants for ever."

This refers to the spiritual children, not the physical descendants of Abraham; they are his descendants who have followed him in faith, whether they are circumcised or not, and have not been generated in a merely material sense. Though he was circumcised, Abraham believed; and it was this that was attributed to him as virtue.

The coming of the Savior was promised to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. These are the children of the promise, the ones to whom it is said, "If you belong to the Prince, then you are descendants of Abraham, and heirs following the promise."

h, King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; keystone of the mighty arch of humanity, please come and save the creature you fashioned from dirt.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you sent your Son to free mankind from the power of death, may those of us who celebrate the coming of the Prince as man share more fully in his divine life; because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ecember 23
John of KANTY, PRIEST

Born at Kanty in Poland in 1390. After becoming a priest, he taught for

many years in an academy in Krakow, and then became pastor of the parish at Olkusz. He was an orthodox teacher of the faith, and gave an example of piety and love of neighbor. Died in 1473.

First Reading

Isaiah 51.1-11

“Listen to me, those of you pursuing virtue,
 who are searching for YHWH:
 Look to the rock you were carved from,
 to the pit you were quarried in;
 Look to your ancestor Abraham
 and to Sarah, the one who gave you birth,
 because he was the only one I called,
 and I blessed him and multiplied him.”
 Yes, YHWH will send Zion comfort;
 he will feel pity for all her ruins.
 He will turn her deserts into Eden
 and her wilderness into YHWH’s garden.
 Happiness and joy will be found in it,
 and singing and the sounds of music.
 “Listen to me, my people,
 pay me your attention, my nation.
 Law will be issued from me,
 and will make my just decrees
 into a light for the peoples.
 My virtue is nearby;
 my rescue has begun its process;
 and my arm will pass sentence on the nations.
 The many shores will put their hope in me,
 and they will trust the power of my arm.
 Bring your eyes up into the heavens
 and look down on the earth below,
 because the sky will dissipate like smoke,
 and the earth will grow thin as an old robe,
 and those who live on it will waste away too;
 but my rescue will last forever,
 and my virtue will never be erased.

Listen to me, those of you who know of virtue,
 you people who have your heart in my Law;
 do not be afraid of the sneers of men
 or be intimidated by their insults,
 because moths will eat them the way they eat clothes,
 and worms will consume them as if they were wool;
 but my virtue will last forever,
 and my rescue will continue from generation to generation.”
 Please waken! Waken and put on your strength,
 arm of YHWH!
 Awaken as you did in olden times,
 in the generations long past.
 Are you not the arm that cut Rahab apart
 and wounded the ancient serpent?
 Are you not the one who dried up the sea,
 the water in the great ocean,
 and made the sea-bed a road
 for those you ransomed to cross upon?
 In this way those YHWH ransomed will return
 and come singing into Zion,
 with eternal joy crowning their heads.
 They will find happiness and joy;
 sorrow and sobs will have vanished.

My people, listen to me; pay me your attention, those of you who belong
 to my race. My virtuous man is close by; my savior is drawing near.

Now those redeemed by the Master will come back and enter Zion
 with songs of praise. My virtuous man is close by; my savior is drawing
 near.

Second Reading

*A treatise against the heresy of Noetus
by St. Hippolytus*

There is only one God, brothers and sisters; and we learn about him
 only from Sacred Scripture. And so it is our duty to become acquainted
 with what Scripture declares and to investigate its teachings thoroughly.

We should believe these teachings in the sense that the Father wills them, and think of the Son in the way the Father wills, and accept the teaching he wills to give us about the Holy Spirit. Sacred Scripture is God's gift to us, and it should be understood in the way he intends; we should not do violence to it by interpreting it to fit our own preconceived ideas.

God was all alone and nothing existed but himself when he determined to create the world. He thought of it, willed it, and spoke the word and made it. It came into being instantly exactly as he had willed. It is enough, then, for us to be aware of a single fact: nothing is coeternal with God. Apart from God there was simply nothing else. Yet although he was alone, he was multiple, because he was not bereft of either reason, wisdom, power, or good judgment. Everything was in him and he himself was everything. At a moment of his own choosing and in a way he himself determined, God showed his Word, and through him he made the whole universe.

When the Word was hidden within God himself he was invisible to the created world; but God made him visible. First God gave utterance to his voice, fathering light from light, and then he sent his own mind into the world as its Master. Though he was previously visible to God alone and not to the world, God made him visible, so that the world could be saved by seeing him. The mind that entered our world was made known as the Son of God. Everything came into existence through him; but he is the only one who was sired by the Father.

The Son gave us the Law and the prophets, and he filled the prophets with the Holy Spirit to compel them to speak. They were inspired by the Father's power to proclaim the Father's purpose and will.

So the Word became evident, as St. John declares, when, in summing up all the sayings of the prophets, he announces that this is the Word through whom the whole universe was made. He says, "In the beginning, there was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the Word was God. Everything came into existence through him, and without him there came to be not even one thing that came into existence." And farther along, he adds, "The world came into being through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came into his own lands, and his own people did not accept him."

Th, Emmanuel, King and legislator, desire of the nations, Savior of all peoples, please come and set us free, our Master and God.

Prayer

Father, as we contemplate the birth of your Son, whose mother was the Virgin Mary, and who came to live among us, may we please receive forgiveness and mercy through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Third Reading

A Letter by Clement XIII

St. John of Kanty deserves a high place among the great saints and scholars who practice what they preach and defend the true faith against those who attack it. When heresy and schism were gaining ground in neighboring territories, his teaching at the University of Krakow was untainted by any error. At the pulpit he fought to raise the standard of holiness among the faithful, and his preaching was reinforced by his humility, his chastity, his sympathy, his bodily penance, and the other qualities of a dedicated priest and Emissary.

He was a unique contribution to the reputation and credit of the professors of the university; he also bequeathed a wonderful example to those of his profession, an inspiration of complete dedication to duty and to their teaching—in theology and other sciences—for the honor and glory of the one God.

With the sense of worship that he brought to his teaching of the sacred sciences, he combined humility. He never put himself above anyone else, and treated himself as not mattering, even though he was acknowledged by everyone as their master. He was so far from pretenses that he even wished to be an object of contempt in the eyes of everyone who underestimated his worth. He could take their insults and cutting remarks in stride.

With his humility went a rare and childlike simplicity; the thoughts of his heart were revealed in his words and actions. If he suspected that someone had felt insulted by his speaking the truth, before going to the

altar, he would ask forgiveness for what was not so much his own sin as the other person's misunderstanding. Every day after his round of duties, he would go straight from the lecture room to church, where he would spend long hours in contemplation and prayer before the hidden Prince of the eucharist. The God in his heart and the God on his lips were one and the same God.

Share your bread with the hungry and take the poor and homeless into your own house. Then your light will shine out like the dawn, and your holiness will precede you.

When you see a man who is naked, give him clothes, and do not sneer at your brother. Then your light will shine out like the dawn, and your holiness will precede you.

Prayer

Omnipotent Father, may we grow in the wisdom of the saints through the example of John of Kanty, and as we show understanding and kindness to others, may we receive your forgiveness. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ecember 24

First Reading

Isaiah 51.17-52.2, 7-10

Waken! Waken!

Rise from your sleep, Jerusalem,
 who drank from YHWH
 the cup of his rage.
 You have drunk the dregs of the fearful cup
 and drained it dry.
 Jerusalem has no one to guide her

among all the sons she gave birth to;
there is no one to take her by the hand
among all the children she reared.
Two things have come upon you,
and is there anyone to be sorry for you?
Desolation and ruin, famine and sword;
and who will I find to comfort you?
Your sons have collapsed
and lie in the street-corners
like antelopes in a net.
They are filled with YHWH's rage
and the reprimand of your God.
And so listen to this, my sufferer,
drunk, but not with wine;
this is what is said by your Master,
YHWH, and your God,
who is pleading your case:
"You see, I have taken out of your hand
the fearful cup,
with the dregs of my rage in it;
you are to drink it no longer.
But I will put it into the hand of those who torment you,
who told you
to lie down so that they could walk over you.
And you laid your bodies as if you were ground
or like a street, for them to walk upon."
Waken! Waken!
Put on your strength, Zion;
Put on your lovely clothes,
Jerusalem, holy city.
Because the uncircumcised and the unclean
will no longer enter you.
Shake the dust off yourself. Stand up
and then take your throne, Jerusalem.
Take the ropes off your neck,

captive daughter, Zion.
 How beautiful upon the mountains
 are the feet of the one who brings good news
 and announces peace,
 and comes with a joyful message of prosperity,
 who proclaims rescue,
 and says to Zion,
 "Your God is on the throne!"
 Listen! Your watchmen are raising a cry
 and shouting for joy in unison,
 because they see directly, in front of their eyes
 YHWH entering Zion.
 Break out in song; chant it together,
 ruins of Jerusalem!
 Because YHWH has brought comfort to his people,
 and has redeemed Jerusalem.
 YHWH has rolled up the sleeves over his holy arm
 as all the nations looked on;
 and all the ends of the earth will see
 our God's rescue.

Wash yourselves off, sons of Israel, says the Master, because tomorrow
 your Master will come down, and he will remove every weakness from
 you.

Tomorrow the depravity of the earth will be destroyed, and the
 Savior of the world will rule over us. And he will remove every weakness
 from you.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Augustine

Waken, mankind! God has become a human being for your sake.
 "Waken, those of you who are sleeping, come back from the dead, and
 the Prince will pour light into you." I will tell you again; it was for your
 sake that God became a human being.

You would have suffered eternal death, if he had not been born into
 time. You would never have been freed from your sinful flesh if he had

not taken on himself the same sinful flesh. You would have suffered eternal unhappiness if it had not been for his mercy. You would never have come back to life if he had not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not come quickly to help you. You would have gone out of existence if he had not come.

And so let us celebrate the coming of our rescue and redemption with joy. Let us celebrate the feast day on which the one who is the great, eternal day came from the great, endless day of eternity into our own short day of time.

“He has become our virtue, our holiness, our redemption, so that, as was written, ‘a person who is proud should take pride in the Master.’”

“And so truth has sprung up out of the earth.” The Prince, who said, “I am truth,” was born to a virgin. “And virtue looked down from heaven” because it is by believing in this new-born child, human beings are made virtuous by God, not from their own efforts.

“Truth has sprung up out of the earth,” because “the Word became flesh.” “And virtue looked down from heaven” because “every good and perfect gift comes from above.”

“Truth has sprung up out of the earth,” taking flesh from Mary. “And virtue looked down from heaven” because “humans can receive nothing if it has not been given to them from heaven.”

“We should be at peace with God, since we have been made virtuous by faith; because virtue and peace have kissed, through our Master Prince Jesus; because truth has sprung up out of the earth, and through him we have access to the gift in which we can stand up straight, and our pride is in the hope of God’s glory;” because “virtue” has not come out of us, but “has looked down from heaven.” And so, “if a person is to be proud, he is to be proud” not of himself, but “of the Master.”

And this is why, when our Master was born to the Virgin, the messages of the angelic voices was, “Glory to God in the spheres of heaven, and peace on earth to those in his favor.”

How could there be peace unless “truth has sprung up out of the earth,” that is, unless the Prince were born from our flesh? And “he is our peace, and is the one who made the two into one thing,” so that we would be in God’s favor, nicely linked by the bond of unity.

And so we should be happy in this favor, so that our pride will give evidence of the good conscience by which we are proud of the Master, not of ourselves. That is why Scripture says, "He is my glory, the one who lifts up my head." What greater gift could God have made to dawn on us than to make his only Son become the son of man, so that a son of man could in his turn become a son of God?

As if we deserved this; ask for its reason, or its justification, and see if you find any other answer but a sheer gift.

A shoot will spring out of Jesse's root and a flower blossom upon it. Virtue will be the belt about his waist, and fidelity the cord about his body.

The Master's spirit will rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of good advice and strength. Virtue will be the belt about his waist, and fidelity the cord about his body.

Prayer

Come, Master Jesus! Do not delay! Please give new courage to your people, who trust in your love, and by your coming raise us to the joy of your Kingdom, where you are alive and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.





First Reading

Isaiah 111-10

This is what is said by YHWH:

A shoot will spring out of Jesse's trunk
and a branch grow out of his root;

YHWH's spirit will rest upon him:

a spirit of wisdom and understanding
a spirit of good judgment and power,
a spirit of knowledge and respect for YHWH.

He finds his pleasure in reverence for YHWH,
and he will not judge by appearances,
or base his decisions on hearsay;

he will hand down honest verdicts to the poor
and give just decisions to the earth's unassuming people.

He will strike down cruelty with the cudgel of his mouth
and slaughter evil people with the breath that comes from his lips.

He will wear virtue like a sash upon his chest,
and fidelity like a belt around his waist.

Then wolves will share dens with lambs,
and leopards and kids bed together;
calves and lion cubs will forage side by side
with a little child to lead them.

A cow will be grazing next to a bear,
and her calf will take rest with the cub;

lions will eat hay like oxen,
and babies play by cobras' nests,
and children's hands will rest on adders' dens.

There will be no pain or damage anywhere on my holy mountain,
because the whole earth will be as full of knowledge of YHWH
as the ocean is full of water.

On that day, Jesse's root

will be held up as a banner for the people;
because the Gentiles will search him out,
and his residence will be full of glory.

Today, for us the King of heaven chose to be born of his virgin mother, to reclaim those lost to the heavenly kingdom. All the angels are calling out their joy, because God has himself come to save mankind.

Glory to God in the spheres of heaven, and peace on earth to those in his favor. All the angels are calling out their joy, because God has himself come to save mankind.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Leo the Great

My dear friends, today our Savior is born; we should be overjoyed. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life; because the fear of death has been swallowed, and life brings us the joy of the promise of eternal bliss.

No one is closed off from this joy; everyone shares the same reason for happiness. Our Master, the victor over sin and death, who found no human being free of sin, came to free us all. Saints should be glad when they see the palm-branch of victory in their hands; sinners should be joyful in receiving the offer of forgiveness; and pagans should take courage as they are invited to live.

When time reached its completion, the time chosen in the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our ordinary humanity to bring it into conformity with its creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the source of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind.

And so at the Master's birth, the angels chant in joy, "Glory to God in the spheres of heaven," and they announce "peace on earth to those in his favor" as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels above us are so enraptured at this marvelous work of God's goodness, what is the happiness it should bring to the hearts of men here below?

My friends, we must thank God the Father, through his Son, and in the Holy Spirit, because in his great love for us, he had mercy on us,

“and when we were dead in our sins, he brought us to life with the Prince,” so that we would be a new creation in him. We must take off our old nature and all its ways and, since we have been born in the Prince, give up material actions.

Remember your dignity, Christian, and now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return by sin to the degraded condition you once were in. Keep in mind who your head is and whose body you are a cell in. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God’s kingdom.

Through the sacrament of the Bath, you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive off so great a guest by wrong behavior so that you become a slave again to the devil, because your freedom was bought by the Prince’s blood.

Today true peace came down to us from heaven. Today the whole earth was filled with heaven’s delight.

Today a new day dawns, the day of our redemption, prepared by God from ages long past, the beginning of our never-ending joy. Today the whole earth was filled with heaven’s delight.

Prayer

Dear God and Master, we praise you for creating human beings and still more for restoring them in the Prince. Since your Son shared our weakness, may we please share his glory, where he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim

cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin’s womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.
Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
since we have put our trust in you.
I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
never let my hopes be shattered.

 Sunday in The Octave
of Christmas:
oly amily

First Reading

Ephesians 5.21-6.4

Give way to each other out of respect for the Prince's authority. Wives are to submit to their own husbands as if they were the Master; because the husband is the head of his wife more or less in the sense in which the Prince is the head of the community; he is the one who keeps the body safe. So in the sense in which the community listens to the Master, wives are to listen to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, you are to love your wives in the same way as the Prince loved the community and surrendered himself for it, to make it holy by washing it with the bath of the water that has the sacred words said over it, so that he could set the community beside himself as something full of dignity, something holy and stainless, without any spot or wrinkle or anything of the sort. This is the way husbands ought to love their wives— as if they were their own bodies. When a man loves his wife, he is loving himself; and of course no one hates his own matter; he feeds and takes care of it, just as the Prince cares for his community, because we are the organs of his body.

“With this in view, a man is to leave his father and mother and attach himself to his wife, and the two will become one body.” Something very profound is hidden in this; I mean the relation between the Prince and the community; but in its literal meaning it says that each of you must love his wife as being his own self; and the wife is to have respect for her husband.

Children are to obey their parents in the Master; this is what their virtue consists in. “Be respectful to your father and mother” is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it: “so that you will

succeed and have a long life on earth.” And parents are not to push their children too hard; they are to bring them up with the Master’s sort of education and training.

Children, obey your parents in the Master, because that is your duty; respect your father and mother.

Jesus returned with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, and lived there and was obedient to them. Respect your father and mother.

Second Reading

An Address by Pope Paul VI

Nazareth is a kind of school where we can begin to discover what the Prince’s life was like and even to understand his good news. Here we can observe and ponder the simple appeal of the way God’s son came to be known, profound yet full of hidden meaning. And gradually, we may even learn to imitate him.

Here we can learn to realize who the Prince really is. And here we can sense and take account of the conditions and circumstances that surrounded and affected his life on earth: the places, the tenor of the times, the culture, the language, religious customs—in brief, everything which Jesus used to make himself known to the world. Here everything speaks to us, everything has meaning. Here we can learn the importance of spiritual training for all those who wish to follow the Prince and live by the teachings of his good news.

How I would like to return to my childhood and attend the simple yet profound school that is Nazareth! How wonderful to be close to Mary, learning again the lesson of the true meaning of life, learning again God’s truths. But here we are only on pilgrimage. Time presses and I must set aside my desire to stay and carry on my education in the good news, because that education is never finished. But I cannot leave without recalling, briefly and in passing, some thoughts I take with me from Nazareth.

First, we learn from its silence. If only we could once again appreciate its great value; we need this wonderful state of mind, since we are beset by the cacophony of strident protests and conflicting claims so characteristic of these turbulent times. The silence of Nazareth should teach us

how to meditate in peace and quiet, to reflect on the deeply spiritual, and to be open to the voice of God's inner wisdom and the advice of his true teachers. Nazareth can teach us the value of study and preparation, of meditation, of a well-ordered personal spiritual life, and of silent prayer that is known only to God.

Second, we learn about family life. May Nazareth serve as a model of what the family should be. May it show us the family's holy and enduring character exemplifying its basic function in society: a community of love and sharing, beautiful for the problems it poses and the rewards it brings; in sum, the perfect setting for rearing children—and for this there is no substitute.

Finally, in Nazareth, the home of a craftsman's son, we learn about work and the discipline it entails. I would especially like to recognize its value—demanding yet redeeming—and to give it proper respect. I would remind everyone that work has its own dignity. On the other hand, it is not an end in itself. Its value and free character, however, derive not only from its place in the economic system, as they say, but rather from the purpose it serves.

In closing, may I express my deep regard for people everywhere who work for a living. To them I would point out their great model, their brother the Prince, our Master and God, who is their prophet in every cause that promotes their well-being.

Have a glad heart, try to grow holy, help each other, stay united, and live in peace. Sing and make music to the Master in your hearts.

Whatever you do, put your whole self into it, as if for the Master and not human beings. Sing and make music to the Master in your hearts.

Prayer

Father, please help us to live like the holy family, united in respect and love, and bring us to the joy and peace of your eternal home. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



December 26

Stephen, PROTOMARTYR

*First Reading**Acts 6.8,7.2,44-59*

Stephen, full of talent and power, was performing miracles and proofs of God's favor among the people. At this, some of the ones who belonged to what is called the "Synagogue of the Freedmen," as well as people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the Province of Asia, stepped forward and took issue with Stephen; but they were not forceful enough to withstand his wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

They then started a rumor with some men claiming that they had heard him utter malicious lies against Moses and God. This provoked the fury of the people, the elders, and the law-experts, who confronted and arrested him and brought him to the Council, where they suborned perjurers, who said, "This man keeps on saying things against this holy place and against the Law: we heard him say that his Jesus of Nazareth was going to destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

As all the members of the Council looked at him, they saw his face appear like the face of an angel.

The chief priest said, "Is this the case?"

He answered, "Gentlemen—my brothers and fathers—hear me out!

"Our ancestors had the Tent of Testimony in the desert, exactly as the One who spoke to Moses directed them to make it following the model he had seen; and this was what our ancestors of the next generation brought in with Joshua when they replaced the nations God kept driving out up until the time of David, who found favor with God and requested permission to build a home for the house of Jacob—though it was Solomon who built the building for him.

"But the Supreme Being does not live in something man-made; as the prophet says,

"The sky is my throne
and the earth my footstool;

What sort of house will you build for me?’ says the Master;

‘what is the place I will rest in?

Was it not my hand that made all this?’

“You are so stiff-necked! Your hearts and ears are so uncircumcised!

You always defy the Holy Spirit; you do just what your ancestors did! Is there one prophet that was not persecuted by your ancestors? They even killed the people who predicted the coming of the virtuous man who was betrayed and murdered by you people, who received the Law given by angels and would not obey it!”

What they heard stung them to the heart, and they gnashed their teeth at him—and meanwhile, full of the Holy Spirit, he was looking up into heaven, where he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing beside him. “Look!” he cried. “I see the sky torn open, and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!”

They screamed and covered their ears, and mobbed him; they dragged him outside the city and began to stone him. Those who were taking part gave their cloaks to a young man named Saul to watch—and they kept throwing stones at Stephen, who was calling out, “Master Jesus! Take my spirit!”

He fell to his knees and cried, “Master, do not hold this sin against them!” And at these words, he fell asleep.

And Saul approved of Stephen’s execution.

While the Judeans were stoning Stephen, God’s slave, the sky opened in front of him; he looked, and entered it. It is such a great privilege for a man to have heaven open before him.

As the stones crashed against him, from the depths of heaven the splendor of life shone on him. It is such a great privilege for a man to have heaven opened before him.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Fulgentius of Ruspe

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal King. Today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of his soldier. Yesterday, our King, dressed in his robe of flesh, left his place in the virgin’s womb and deigned to visit the world. Today his soldier leaves the tent of his body

and rises triumphantly to heaven.

Our King, despite his elevated majesty, came in humility for our sake; but he did not come empty-handed. He brought his soldiers a great gift that not only made them rich, but unconquerable in battle: the gift of love, which was to bring human beings a share in his divinity. He gave some of his abundance, yet without losing anything of his own. In a marvelous way he changed into wealth the poverty of his faithful followers, while remaining in full possession of his own inexhaustible riches.

And so the love that brought the Prince from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven; what was shown first in the king shone out later in his soldier. Love was Stephen's weapon, by which he won every battle, and in this way won the crown indicated by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the savage mob; his love for his neighbor made him pray for those who were stoning him. Love inspired him to correct those who were mistaken, so that they would change; love led him to pray for those who were stoning him, to save them from punishment. Since he was given strength by the power of his love, he won over the raging cruelty of Saul, and won his persecutor on earth as his companion in heaven. In his holy and tireless love, he longed to gain by prayer those he could not convert by his speeches.

And now, finally, Paul is happy with Stephen, and with Stephen he is enjoying the glory of the Prince; with Stephen he is overjoyed, and with Stephen he is reigning. Stephen went first, killed by the stones thrown by Paul, but Paul followed, helped by Stephen's prayer.

And this is obviously the way to live, my brothers and sisters; it is a life where Paul feels no shame because of Stephen's death, and Stephen finds joy in Paul's company, because love fills both of them with happiness. It was Stephen's love that conquered the cruelty of the mob, and it was Paul's love that covered the huge number of his sins; it was love that won for both of them the Kingdom of Heaven.

In fact, love is the source of everything good; it is an impregnable defense, and the way that leads to heaven. A person who walks about in love cannot wander off the road or experience fear; love guides him, protects him, and brings him to his journey's end

December 26: Stephen, ΠΡΟΤΟΜΑΡΤΥΡ 111

My brothers and sisters, the Prince made love the ladder that would enable all Christians to climb to heaven. And so, hold fast to it in all sincerity; give each other practical proof of it, and by your progress in it, make your ascent together.

Yesterday, the Master was born on earth so that Stephen would be born in heaven. The Master entered our world so that Stephen would enter heaven.

Yesterday our King, dressed in our flesh, came out of the virgin's womb to live among us. The Master entered our world so that Stephen would enter heaven.

Prayer

Master, today we celebrate the entrance of Stephen into eternal glory. Since he died praying for those who killed him, please help us imitate his goodness and love our enemies. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim
cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,

your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
 and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
 You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
 the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
 And as you undertook to set man free,
 you did not recoil at the Virgin's womb;
 and when you overcame the sting of death,
 you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
 and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
 And we believe you will return to be our judge.
 And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
 whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
 Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
 Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
 And be their King and support from now for ever.
 We sing your praises each and every day,
 and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
 Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
 to keep us free of sin.
 Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
 since we have put our trust in you.
 I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
 never let my hopes be shattered.



First Reading

1 John 1.2-3

What existed from the beginning, what we heard, what we saw with
 our own eyes, what we looked on and handled with our hands, dealing
 with the meaning of life—and the life disclosed itself; we have seen it and
 swear to it, and we inform you of the eternal life which existed facing the

Father and which disclosed itself to us—what we saw and heard is what we are informing you of so that you will have companionship with us. Our companionship is with the Father and with his Son Prince Jesus; and we are writing this for your joy to be complete.

And this is the message we heard from him and are reporting to you: that God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. If we were to say that we had companionship with him and were walking about in darkness, we would be lying and not doing what is true; but if we walk about in the light, in the way that he exists in the light, we have companionship with each other, and the blood of Jesus washes us clean of every sin.

If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us; if we admit our sins, he is faithful and just, and will remove the sins from us and wash us clean of any vice. If we claim that we have not sinned, we are making him a liar, and what he has said is not in us.

My children, I am writing this to keep you from sinning; but if any of us commits a sin, we have a patron to speak for us before the Father, the virtuous Prince Jesus; he is himself the conciliation for our sins, and not simply for ours, but the sins of the whole world. And this is the way we are to recognize that we know him: by keeping his commandments.

We announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has been revealed to us. We are writing of this for you to be happy, and for your happiness to be complete.

All this has been written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Prince, the Son of God, and that by your belief you will have life in his name, and for your happiness to be complete.

Second Reading

*Tractates on the First Letter of John
by St. Augustine*

“Our message is the Word of life We announce what existed from the beginning, what we heard, what we saw with our own eyes, what we looked on and handled with our hands.” Who could touch the Word with his hands unless “The Word became flesh and made his home among us”?

Now this Word, whose flesh was so real that he could be touched by human hands, began to be flesh in the Virgin Mary's womb; but he did not begin to exist at that moment. We know this from what John says, "What existed from the beginning." Notice how John's letter is evidence of his Report of the Good News, which you heard just a moment ago: "In the beginning, there was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God."

Someone might interpret the phrase "The Word of life" as meaning a word about the Prince, rather than the Prince's body itself which was touched by human hands. But consider what comes next: "and the life was revealed." Hence, the Prince himself is the Word of life.

And how was this life revealed? It existed from the beginning, but was not revealed to human beings, but only to angels, who looked upon it and feasted upon it as their own spiritual bread. But what does Scripture say? "Mankind ate the bread of angels."

Life itself was therefore revealed in the flesh. In this way, what was visible to the heart alone could also become visible to the eye, and so could heal people's hearts. That is, the Word is visible only to the heart, while flesh is visible to bodily eyes as well. We already had the means to see flesh, but we had no way of seeing the Word; and so the Word became flesh so that we could see it, to heal that part of us by which we could see the Word.

John continues, "We have seen it and swear to it, and we inform you of the eternal life which existed facing the Father and which disclosed itself to us"—or, one could say more simply, "was revealed to us."

"We inform you of what we have heard and seen." Make sure that you grasp the meaning of these words. The students saw the Master in the flesh, face to face; they heard the words he spoke, and they in turn proclaimed the message to us; and so we have heard also, though we have not seen anything.

But then are we less favored than those who both saw and heard it? If that were the case, why would John add, "so that you too will have fellowship with us"? They saw what they saw, and we have not seen it; yet we have fellowship with them, because we and they share the same faith.

"And our fellowship is with God the Father and his Son, Prince

Jesus. And we write this to you to make your happiness complete.”
Complete in that fellowship, in that love, and in that unity.

At the last dinner, John lay on the dining-couch close to the Master; it was the privilege of that Emissary to have the secrets of heaven revealed to him.

He drank from the streams of living water which flowed from the Master’s heart; it was the privilege of that Emissary to have the secrets of heaven revealed to him.

Prayer

God, our Father, since you have revealed the secrets of your Word through your Emissary John, may we, by prayer and reflection, come to understand the wisdom he taught. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim
cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaims you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.

You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
 the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
 And as you undertook to set man free,
 you did not recoil at the Virgin's womb;
 and when you overcame the sting of death,
 you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
 and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
 And we believe you will return to be our judge.
 And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
 whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
 Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
 Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
 And be their King and support from now for ever.
 We sing your praises each and every day,
 and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
 Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
 to keep us free of sin.
 Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
 since we have put our trust in you.
 I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
 never let my hopes be shattered.



December 28
 Holy Innocents, Martyrs

First Reading

Exodus 1.8-16, 22

A new king, who knew nothing about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. He said to his subjects, "Notice how numerous and powerful the Israelite people are growing, even more than we are ourselves. We have to be very careful with them, to stop them from increasing, or if there is a war they might join our enemies and fight against us, and leave our country."

And so taskmasters were set over the Israelites to oppress them with hard labor; and in this way they had to build for Pharaoh the cities of Pithom and Raamses; and yet the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and increased. That caused the Egyptians to dread the Israelites; and they reduced them to cruel slavery, making life bitter for them by hard work in mortar and bricks and all kinds of field work: the whole cruel fate of slaves.

The King of Egypt also told the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was called Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives for the Hebrew women and see them giving birth, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she may live.”

Pharaoh then commanded all his subjects, “Throw into the river every boy that is born to the Hebrews; but you may let the girls live.”

I will enjoy my people; never again will weeping and crying be heard among them.

Death will no longer exist; grief, tears, and sorrow will be forgotten, because now I am making everything new. Never again will weeping and crying be heard among them.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Quodvultdeus

A child is born, who is a great king. Wise men are led to him from far off, and come to worship the one who is lying in a manger and yet is king over heaven and earth. When they tell of someone who was born to be king, Herod is taken aback, and to save his kingdom, he resolves to kill him—though if he would only have faith in this child, he would reign in peace in this life himself, as well as forever in the life to come.

Why are you afraid, Herod, when you hear of the birth of a king? He does not come to supplant you; it is to conquer the devil. But because you do not understand this, you are disturbed and enraged, and to destroy the child you are looking for, you show your cruelty in the death of a great many children.

You are not restrained by the love of weeping mothers or fathers mourning the death of their sons, nor by the cries and sobs of the children. You are destroying people with tiny bodies because fear is

destroying your heart; you imagine that if you can fulfill your desire you can prolong your own life, though you are trying to kill Life itself.

Your throne is threatened by the source of grace—so small, and yet so great—who is lying in the manger. He is using you, without your having the slightest inkling of it, to work out his own purpose of freeing souls from captivity to the devil. He has taken the children of the enemy up into the ranks of God's adopted children.

The children are dying for the Prince, even though they are unaware of doing so; and their parents are mourning the death of martyrs. The child makes of those unable to speak fitting witnesses of himself. Notice the kind of kingdom he has, since this is the kind of king he came to be. Notice how the rescuer is already producing liberation, and the savior is already producing salvation.

But, Herod, you do not know this, and are disturbed and enraged. While you vent your fury against the child, you are already paying him homage, without being aware of it.

What a great gift of grace this is! What is it the children did to deserve this kind of victory? They cannot speak, and yet they act as witnesses to the Prince; they cannot use their arms to fight in battle, and yet they already are carrying off the palm of victory.

They worshiped the one who lives for ever and ever; they laid down their crowns before the throne of their Master and God.

They fell on their faces before his throne and gave praise to the one who lives for ever and ever. They laid down their crowns before the throne of their Master and God.

Prayer

Father, since the Holy Innocents offered you praise by the death they suffered for the Prince, may our lives also bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim
cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaims you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin’s womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.

Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
 since we have put our trust in you.
 I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
 never let my hopes be shattered.

ECEMBER 29
 THOMAS À BECKET, MARTYR

Born in London, 1118. He became chancellor to the King and in 1162 was chosen bishop of Canterbury. His defense of the Church against Henry II brought him exile to France for six years. After returning, he was murdered in 1170 by the King.

First Reading

Colossians 1.1-14

Paul, an emissary of Prince Jesus by the will of God and Timothy my brother, to the sacred people in Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters in the Prince: Blessings and peace to you from God our father.

We keep thanking God the Father of our Master Prince Jesus whenever we pray for you, since we have heard of your belief in Jesus the Prince and of the love you have for all the sacred people because of the hope you have stored in heaven—a hope based on what you heard earlier in the facts you were told in the Report of the good news that came to you—as it is now coming to the whole world; and it is becoming productive and growing as it did with you from the day you first heard and recognized the truth of God’s gift, as you were taught by Epaphras, our friend and fellow-slave, who is a faithful servant of the Prince for us, and who informed us of your love in the spirit.

This is why, since the day we heard of this, we have kept praying for you, and asking to have you filled with the knowledge of the Prince’s will for you in all your wisdom and spiritual insight as to how to behave as the Master has a right to expect, to make you pleasing to him in every way: flourishing in every good deed you do, and increasing in knowledge of God, and growing strong in every sort of power by the might of his glory, so that you will be able to stand any kind of hardship and tolerate

everything gladly, and thank the Father, who has made you fit to share the inheritance of the sacred people in the light—and who extricated us from the power of darkness and moved us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, from whom we have forgiveness and removal of our sins.

Let us show our gratitude to our Father and God, because he has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves.

Every good and perfect gift comes down to us from above, from the Father of light, because he has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Bernard

“The goodness and humanity of our Savior God have appeared among us.” We thank God for the many consolations he has given us during this sorrowful exile of our pilgrimage here on earth. Before the Son of God became man, his goodness was hidden, though God’s mercy is eternal; but how could this goodness be recognized? It was promised but not experienced, and so very few believed in it. “Often and in many ways, the Master once spoke through the prophets.”

Among other things, God said, “I think thoughts of peace, not of torment.” But what did men answer, since they thought thoughts of torment, and knew nothing of peace? They said, “Peace; peace; but there is no peace.” This answer made the “angels of peace weep bitterly,” and say, “Master, who has believed our message?” But now people believe it because they see it with their own eyes, and because “God’s evidence has now become even more believable.” He has gone so far as to “make his residence in the sun” so that even the dimmest eyes can see him.

Notice that peace is not promised; it is sent to us; it is no longer put off, it is given; peace is not prophesied, but achieved. It is as if God the Father sent a purse full of his mercy to earth; and the purse burst open during the Master’s suffering, to pour out its hidden contents: the price of our ransom.

It was only a small purse, but it was very full. As Scripture tells us, “A little child has been given to us, but the whole completeness of the

Divine nature has its home in him.” The fullness of time brought with it the fullness of divinity. God’s Son came in the flesh so that mortal men could see and recognize God’s kindness; when God reveals his humanity, his goodness cannot possibly remain concealed. What more could he do to show his kindness than to take my human form? And I say *my* humanity, not Adam’s, not the humanity he had before his fall.

How could he have shown his mercy more clearly than by taking our condition upon himself? The Word of God became like grass for our sake. What better proof could he have given of his love? Scripture says, “Master, what is a human being that you should notice him; why does your heart go out to him?” The incarnation teaches us how much God cares for us and what he thinks and feels about us.

We should stop thinking of our own sufferings and remember what he has suffered. Let us think of all the Master has done for us, and then we will realize how his goodness appears through his humanity. The less he became through his human nature, the greater was his goodness; the more he lowered himself for me, the dearer he is to me. “The goodness and humanity of our Savior God have appeared,” says the Emissary.

The goodness and humanity of God are really magnificent and evident. He has given us a marvelous proof of his goodness by adding humanity to his own Divine nature.

From all eternity God destined us in Prince Jesus to be his children by adoption, because it was his loving purpose to reveal in us the glory of his grace.

Long ago he knew us and chose to make us as a copy of his own Son, because it was his loving purpose to reveal in us the glory of his grace.

Prayer

Omnipotent and unseen God, since the coming of your light into the world has made darkness vanish, please teach us to announce the birth of your Son, Prince Jesus, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*Third Reading**A Letter by St. Thomas à Becket*

If those of us who are called bishops want to understand the meaning of our vocation and to deserve it, we must work hard to keep our eyes on the one God chose as high priest forever, and to follow in his footsteps. He offered himself to the Father on the altar of the cross for our sake; and he now looks down from heaven upon our actions and secret thoughts, and one day he will give each of us the payment our deeds deserve.

As successors to his Emissaries, we hold the highest rank in our communities; we have accepted the responsibility of acting as the Prince's representatives on earth; we receive the honor belonging to this office, and enjoy the temporal benefits of our spiritual labor. Therefore, it must be our endeavor to destroy the reign of sin and death, and, by nurturing faith and integrity of life, to build the Church of the Prince into a holy Temple in the Master.

There are a great many bishops in the church, and I wish to God we were the zealous teachers and shepherds that we promised to be at our consecration, and still profess to be. The harvest is good, and one reaper or even several of them would not be enough to gather all of it into the Master's granary; but the Roman Church remains the head of all the churches and the source of Catholic teaching.

Of this there can be no doubt. Everyone knows that the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven were given to the Rock; and the whole fabric of the Church will continue to be built upon his faith and teaching until we all reach maturity in the Prince and attain unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

Of course, there are many people needed to plant and many to water, now that the faith has spread so far, and the population has become so great. Even in ancient times, when the people of God had only one altar, many teachers were needed; this is even truer now for an assembly of nations so great that Lebanon itself could not provide fuel for sacrifice, and neither Lebanon nor Judea could supply with beasts for burnt offerings.

Still, no matter who plants or waters, God gives no harvest unless what he plants is the faith of the Rock, and unless he himself agrees with

the Rock's teaching. All important questions that arise among God's people are referred to the judgment of the Rock in the person of the Roman Pontiff. Under him, the servants of Mother Church exercise the powers entrusted to them, each in his own sphere of responsibility.

Remember, then, how our fathers worked out their rescue; remember the sufferings through which the Church has grown, and the storms the Rock's ship has weathered because it has the Prince on board. Remember how the crown was gained by those whose sufferings gave new radiance to their faith; the whole company of saints bears witness to the unfailing truth that without real effort no one wins the crown.

The Master crowned you with holiness; he dressed you in glory. God, Israel's Holy One, has his home in you.

You have fought the good fight; you have run the race to the finish; now a crown of holiness is waiting for you. He dressed you in glory. God, Israel's Holy One, has his home in you.


Prayer

Omnipotent God, since you granted the martyr Thomas the grace to give his life for the cause of justice, by his prayers please make us willing to renounce for the Prince our life in this world so that we will find it in heaven. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim
cry out in chorus,
"Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—

Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!"
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin's womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.
Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
since we have put our trust in you.
I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
never let my hopes be shattered.

 December 30

First Reading

Colossians 1.15-2.3

Prince Jesus is the visible counterpart of the invisible God and the first-born of the whole of creation, because everything in heaven and on earth was created in him; everything visible and invisible—Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers, everything—was created through him and for him; he himself exists before everything and everything is kept in existence in him.

He is also the head of the body which is the community; he is its Principality—its ruler and source—the first-born of the dead, so that he will have the first place in everything; because he thought it proper for all the fullness of being to be located in him, and for everything on earth and in heaven to be brought by him into conformity with him, as he made peace by shedding blood on his cross.

You once had transformed yourselves in the other direction, and had made your minds enemies of God by doing what was evil; but now you have changed back through the death of his material body, and can present yourselves as holy, blameless, and innocent before him, provided you keep yourselves firmly settled on your foundation of belief and do not move off the hope offered in the report of the good news you listened to—which has been delivered in every part of creation under heaven, and is the one I, Paul, am entrusted with.

I am happy now in what I am going through for you; I am in my own flesh completing what was left out of the Prince's suffering for that body of his which is the community, which I serve by the assignment God gave me to complete what God told us: the secret hidden for ages and for generation after generation, and now revealed to his sacred people: those God chose to be aware of what a wealth of glory there is for the Gentiles in this secret—which is the Prince who is in you, and who is your hope of glory, and is the contents of the information we give to every person, and the contents of the teaching of all the wisdom we offer to every person, so that we will be able to present every person as mature in the Prince; this is what I am working and struggling for with the energy that comes from him and works inside me with his power.

And I want you to know the extent of the struggle I am making for you and the Laodiceans, and all the people who have not seen me face to face; I am trying to have your hearts find support and for you to be knit

together in love, and to arrive at the full richness of certainty in your knowledge because of your understanding of God's secret, the Prince, who conceals within himself the total accumulation of wisdom and knowledge.

The Prince is the head, and the Church is his body; he is the firstborn of the dead, so that in every way primacy is his.

Before anything came into being, he existed; he holds everything in unity, so that in every way primacy is his.

Second Reading

*A Treatise on the Refutation of All Heresies
by St. Hippolytus*

Our faith is not based on empty words, and we are not driven by whim or taken in by plausible-sounding arguments; we put our faith in words spoken by the Power of God, spoken by the Word Himself at God's command. God wanted to win human beings back from disobedience by appealing to their free will by a call to liberty, not by using force to reduce them to slavery.

The Word spoke in the first place through prophets; but because that message was couched in such obscure language that it could only be imperfectly understood, in the final days the Father sent the Word in person, and commanded him to show himself openly so that the world could see him and be saved.

We know that he refashioned our human nature by taking a body from the Virgin; we know that his manhood was made of the same clay as our own; if this were not true, he could hardly have been a teacher who could expect to be imitated. If he were a different sort of reality from me, he certainly would not have ordered me to do as he did, when I am so weak by my own nature; this sort of demand could not be reconciled with goodness and justice.

No, he wanted us to consider him as no different from ourselves; and so he worked, he was hungry and thirsty, and he slept. He endured his suffering without protest, he submitted to death, and revealed his return to life; and in all these ways he offered his own manhood as the firstfruits

of our race, to keep us from losing our courage when suffering comes our way, and to make us look forward to receiving the same reward as his, since we know that we possess the same humanity.

When we have come to know the true God, both our bodies and our souls will be immortal and incorruptible. We will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, because while we lived on earth we acknowledged heaven's King. We will be friends of God and coheirs with the Prince, and subject to no evil desires or inclinations, or to any disability of body or soul, because we will have become divine. It was because of our human condition that God allowed us to endure these things; but when we have been deified and made immortal, God has promised us a share in his own attributes.

So the saying, "Know yourself" means that we should recognize and acknowledge in ourselves the God who made us in his own image; because if we do this, we will also be recognized and acknowledged by our Maker. So we ought not to be at war with ourselves; we should change our way of life without delay. "Because the Prince, who is God, elevated above all creation" has removed man's sin and has refashioned our fallen nature. In the beginning, God made man in his image, and so gave proof of his love for us; and if we obey his holy commands and learn to imitate his goodness, we will be like him and he will honor us. God is not miserly, and for his own glory he has given us a share in his divinity.

The Word became man, and lived among us; and we have seen how great he is, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God's blessings and truth.

He was seen on earth and lived among human beings; and we have seen how great he is, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God's blessings and truth.

Prayer

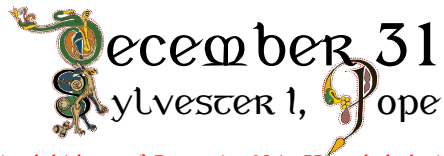
Omnipotent God, may the human birth of your Son free us from our former slavery to sin and bring us new life. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you

and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
we humbly call you Master.
The whole world honors you
as its eternal Father.
all the angels too,
the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
the cherubim and seraphim
cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin’s womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.

Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.
Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
since we have put our trust in you.
I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
never let my hopes be shattered.



Ordained bishop of Rome in 314. He ruled during the reign of Constantine and during the Arian and Donatist heresies. Died in 335 and is buried in the cemetery of Priscilla on the Appian Way.

First Reading

Colossians 2.4-15

I am telling you this to keep any of you from being taken in by plausible-sounding arguments. Even if I am not there with you materially, I am with you in spirit, and I am happy to see how logical and solid your belief in the Prince is. And since you have accepted Prince Jesus as your Master, act in him, with your roots and your superstructure in him, and your foundation in the belief you were taught, so that you will overflow with thankfulness.

But be careful not to let anyone spoil this with “scientific facts” or empty speculation based either on human tradition or on the elements of the universe and not on the Prince; because he is the one who embodies the totality of divinity, and the one in whom you reach your fulfillment; he is the head of every Principality or Power; he is the one in whom you received the non-physical circumcision which is the cutting off of your material bodies—the Prince’s circumcision, since when you were bathed and you sank into the water, you were buried with him, and that was when you came to life again by your belief in the activity of God who brings people back from death; and when you were dead bodies because of your immorality and the lack of material circumcision, he brought you

to life with the Prince, and freely forgave all our immorality; he erased the debt we had written against us; he took it out of our record and nailed it to the cross—and while he was on it he also publicly stripped the Principalities and Powers and made them captured slaves in his triumphal march.

The fullness of divinity lives in the Prince's humanity; he is the head over every power and authority.

In our bath in baptism we were buried with the Prince, and in that bath we have risen to a new life with him through our faith in the power of God. He is the head over every power and authority.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Leo the Great

Although the condition of infancy, which the majesty of the Son of God did not find it undignified to assume, developed with the passage of time into the maturity of manhood, and although after the triumph of his suffering and return to life all the little acts he undertook on our behalf belong to the past, still, today's feast of Christmas renews for us the sacred beginning of Jesus's life: his birth from the Virgin Mary.

In the very act in which we are showing reverence to the birth of our Savior, we are also celebrating our own new birth; because the birth of the Prince is the origin of the Christian people; and the birthday of the head is also the birthday of the body.

Though each and every individual occupies a definite place in this body to which he has been called, and though all the offspring of the Church are differentiated and sealed with the passage of time, it is still true that just as the whole community of the faithful, which was once engendered in the baptismal font, was crucified with the Prince in his suffering, brought back to life with him in the resurrection and at the ascension enthroned beside the Father, that whole community is born with him at his birth, and that is what we are celebrating today.

That is, every believer given new life in the Prince, no matter in what part of the world he lives, breaks with that ancient way of life that comes from original sin, and is transformed by rebirth into a new man. From that time on, he is considered to be of the line of the Prince, not of his

earthly father; of the Prince who became Son of Man precisely so that human beings could become children of God; because if he had not come down to us in his humility, none of us by our own merits could have gone up to him.

And so the greatness of the gift which he has bestowed on us demands an appreciation commensurate with its excellence; as the blessed Emissary Paul teaches, "We have not received the spirit of this world, we have received the Spirit which is from God, so that we could understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." The only way that he can be appropriately honored by us is by our offering him what he has already given to us.

But what can we find in the treasure of the Master's generosity more in keeping with the glory of this feast than that peace which was first proclaimed by the choir of angels on the day of his birth? It is that peace, from which children of God are born, that sustains love and is the mother of unity; it refreshes the blessed and shelters eternity; its characteristic function and special blessing is to join to God those it separates from this world.

And so, those "who were born from God, not from blood or material desire or human choice" should offer the Father their harmony as children united in peace; and all those he has adopted as cells in his body should meet in the firstborn of creation who came not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him; because the grace of the Father has adopted as heirs those who are one thing in thought and love, not those who are fighting or disagreeing with one another. The hearts and minds of those who have been re-formed to one and the same image should be in agreement with each other.

The birthday of the Master is the birthday of peace, as the Emissary Paul says: "Because he is our peace, and has made us both one thing"; because whether we are Judean or Gentile, "through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father."

You were once far from God, but now you have been brought very near through the Prince's blood; the one who made us all one thing is himself our peace.

The Prince came to report the good news to us: peace to those of you who were far off, and peace to those who are near. The one who made us all one thing is himself our peace.

Prayer

Eternally alive God, since in the birth of your Son our religion has its origin and its perfect fulfillment, please help us share in the life of the Prince, because he is mankind's rescue, and is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Third Reading *Ecclesiastical History, by Eusebius of Caesarea*

Glory to the omnipotent God, the King of the universe, for all his gifts, and thanks to Prince Jesus, the Savior and redeemer of our souls, through whom we pray that this peace will be preserved for us in a stable and unshaken way forever; and that it will be a peace that will keep us safe from trouble on the outside as well as from every anxiety and disturbance of soul.

When this bright, shining day, darkened by no cloud, shone with heavenly light on the churches of Christ through the world, even those outside our community shared at least some of the blessings God had bestowed on us, though they did not have the same reason for being happy. But it was especially true for those of us who placed our hopes in the Prince, that there was inexpressible joy and a heavenly happiness on every face. We saw every place that shortly before had been devastated by the tyrant's evil actions now restored to life, seeming to recover from a long and fatal disease. Churches were once again rising high into the air out of the ground, far surpassing in splendor and magnificence the ones that had previously been stormed and ruined.

Then came the sight that we had prayed and hoped for: dedication festivals through the cities, and the consecration of the newly-erected houses of worship. And for this there were convocations of bishops, gatherings of pilgrims from far-off lands, warm and loving contact between the different communities, as the members of the Prince's body united in complete unanimity.

The mysterious prophesy, "Bone came together with bone and joint

came to joint” was fulfilled in this way, as were all the other prophecies that had been announced with no mistakes by prototypes and symbols. All the cells of the body were filled with the grace of the one divine Spirit, all of them were of one mind, with the same enthusiasm for the faith, and on the lips of all of them there was one hymn of praise.

Yes, and our bishops performed religious rites with full ceremonial; priests officiated at the liturgy, the solemn ritual of the Church, chanting psalms, proclaiming the other parts of the God-given Scriptures, and celebrating the divine mysteries. The bath was also administered, the sacred symbol of our Savior’s suffering. Without the slightest distraction, men and women of all ages united in prayer and gratitude, with their minds and hearts full of joy as they gave glory to God, the giver of all good gifts.

The Prince’s peace ought to reign in your hearts; you have been called as cells in one body to that peace; be thankful. All of you are one thing in Jesus the Prince.

Sing a new song to the Master; have the believers meet and sing his praises. All of you are one thing in Jesus the Prince.

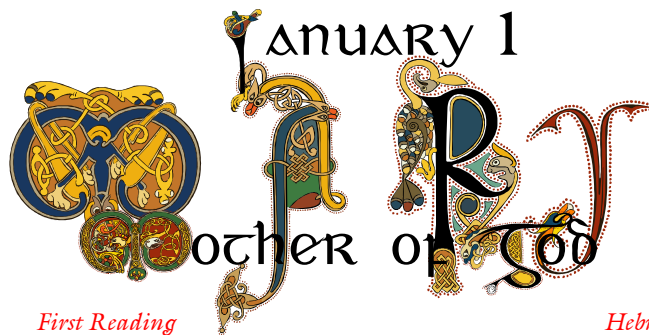
Prayer

Master, please help and preserve your people by the prayers of Pope Sylvester. Please guide us always in this present life and bring us to the joy that never ends. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
 we humbly call you Master.
 The whole world honors you
 as its eternal Father.
 all the angels too,
 the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
 the cherubim and seraphim

cry out in chorus,
“Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!”
The glorious college of Apostles,
the venerable guild of Prophets,
the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;
the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin’s womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.
Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
since we have put our trust in you.
I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
never let my hopes be shattered.



First Reading

Hebrews 2.9-17

But we do see Jesus, the one who “became for a short time less than the angels,” and who was, by his suffering and death, “crowned with glory and honor,” so that he would taste death to bring the favor of God upon everything.

That is, it was appropriate that the one for whom everything exists and by whom everything exists would, in the act of leading many children to glory, complete the act by the suffering of the primary leader of their rescue; because the one who makes holy and those who are made holy come all from a single source. And this is the reason why he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters: “I will announce your name to my brothers; I will sing your praise in their gathering”; and also “I will exist in belief in him”; and again, “Here am I with the children God has given me.”

And since the “children” all have blood and flesh in common, he too took an equal share of it, so that by his death he could nullify the power of the one who controls death, the devil, and set free those who through fear of death were enslaved their whole lives long.

That is, he is clearly not concerned with angels; he is “concerned with the descendants of Abraham.” And it follows that it was appropriate for him to be like his brothers in every way, for him to be a merciful and faithful high priest in God’s service, to win forgiveness for the sins of the people.

What a tremendous privilege you had, Virgin Mary, in carrying within

you the Master and Creator of the world; you are the Mother of your Maker, and yet you remain a virgin forever.

We salute you, favorite of God; the Master is with you. You are the Mother of your Maker, and yet you remain a virgin forever.

Second Reading

A Letter by St. Athanasius

The Emissary tells us, “The Word took to himself the descendants of Abraham, and he had to be like his brothers in everything.” He had then to take a body like ours. This explains the fact of Mary’s presence; she is to provide him with a body of his own, to be offered for our sake. Scripture records her giving birth, and says, “She wrapped him in a blanket.” He breasts, which fed him, were called privileged. Sacrifice was offered because the child was her firstborn. Gabriel used careful and wise language when he announced his birth; he did not speak of what will be born *in you*,” to avoid the impression that a body would be introduced into her womb from outside; he spoke of “what will be born *from you*,” so that we would know by faith that her child originated within her and from her.

By taking our nature and offering it in sacrifice, the Word was to destroy it completely and then invest it with his own nature, and so prompt the Emissary to say, “This corruptible body has to put on incorruption; this mortal body must dress itself in immortality.”

This was not done only in outward appearance, as some have imagined; this is not true. Our Savior really became a human being, and from this the rescue of humanity as a whole has followed. Our rescue is not imaginary in any way, and it does not merely apply to the body. The rescue of the whole human being—that is, of soul and body—has really been achieved in the Word himself.

What was born to Mary was therefore human by nature, as the inspired Scriptures foretold, and the Master’s body was a real body: it was a real body because it was the same as ours. Mary, you see, is our sister, because we are all descended from Adam.

The words of St. John—“The Word became flesh”—have the same meaning, as we can see from a similar turn of phrase in St. Paul: “The Prince became a curse for our sake.” The human body has acquired

something great through its connection and union with the Word; from being mortal, it has become immortal; though it was a living body, it has become a spiritual one; though it was made from dirt, it has passed through the gates of heaven.

Even when the Word takes a body from Mary, the Trinity remains a Trinity, with neither increase nor decrease. It is forever perfect. In the Trinity, we recognize one Divinity, and hence one God, the Father of the Word, is proclaimed in the Church.

Pure and holy Virgin, how can I find words to praise your beauty? The highest heavens cannot contain the God you carried in your womb.

You are the most remarkable woman in the world, for bearing such a remarkable offspring. The highest heavens cannot contain the God you carried in your womb.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we always become better by the prayers of the Virgin Mother Mary, just as you bring us life and rescue through Prince Jesus her Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Te Deum

We sing your praise as God;
 we humbly call you Master.
 The whole world honors you
 as its eternal Father.
 all the angels too,
 the heavens and the Powers of the universe,
 the cherubim and seraphim
 cry out in chorus,
 "Holy! Holy! Holy Master! God Sabaoth—
 Heaven and earth are filled with the majesty of your glory!"
 The glorious college of Apostles,
 the venerable guild of Prophets,
 the white-robed army of Martyrs chant their praise to you;

the holy Church throughout the world acclaim you
as Father of unfathomable majesty,
your true and only Son as worthy of our adoration,
and the Holy Spirit as our Patron.
You, our Prince, are the King of Glory,
the ever-eternal Son of the Father.
And as you undertook to set man free,
you did not recoil at the Virgin's womb;
and when you overcame the sting of death,
you opened the Kingdom of Heaven to us believers;
and now you are enthroned beside God in the glory of the Father;
And we believe you will return to be our judge.
And so we beg you, please come to the aid of your family,
whom you have bought with your priceless blood.
Record them with the Sacred People in glory.
Please save your people, Master, and bless your inheritance,
And be their King and support from now for ever.
We sing your praises each and every day,
and sanctify your name for ages and for ages upon ages.
Grant us the blessing, Master, for this day,
to keep us free of sin.
Have your mercy, Master, descend upon us,
since we have put our trust in you.
I have placed my trust in you, my Master;
never let my hopes be shattered.

JANUARY 2 to Epiphany



First Reading

Colossians 2.16-3.4

So do not let anyone criticize what you are eating or drinking, or whether you are observing some traditional Judean festival or new moon or Sabbath; they are shadows of what was to happen; but the body that casts the shadow is the Prince's. Don't let anyone cheat you of what you have by trying to drag your minds down to worshiping angels, even if they pester you in the conceit of their materialistic minds with visions and things they have "seen"; they have lost the head on which the whole body, no matter what its ligaments or joints, depends and is held together, and grows with God's growth.

If you died with the Prince and passed away from the elements of the universe, why do you keep obeying them as if you lived in the universe? "Don't handle this." "Don't eat that." "Don't touch this." All this deals with what ceases to exist after it is consumed, and is based on human commands and learning; it may have reason or wisdom behind it, but only for those who worship their own wills, or whose minds are degraded, or who hate their bodies; but it is actually of no value even in satisfying a person materially.

But then if you did come back to life with the Prince, aim at what is above, where the Prince has his throne beside God's; give your attention to what is above, not what is on the earth. You died, remember, and your life is now concealed with the Prince in God; and when the Prince, who is our life, comes into the open, we will also come into the open with him in glory.

Since you share the Prince's risen life with him, give your attention to what is above, where the Prince is enthroned beside the Father; your thoughts are to be about heavenly things and not earthly ones.

Your heart is where you keep what you value. Your thoughts are to be about heavenly things and not earthly ones.

*Second Reading**On the Holy Spirit, by St. Basil the Great*

A spiritual man is one who no longer lives materially and is led by the Spirit of God; he is someone called a son of God, remade into an image of God's Son.

We can form a word either as a thought in the mind or a sound on the lips. So the Holy Spirit, in giving evidence to our spirits, cries out in our minds, "Abba! (Dad!)," or speaks in our place, as Scripture says, "It is not you who will be speaking; it is the Spirit of the Father who will be speaking in you."

In the gifts that he distributes, we can see the Spirit as a whole in relation to his parts. We are all organs of each other, but with different gifts, in accordance with the grace that God gives us. "So an eye cannot say to a hand that it doesn't need it, nor can the head tell the feet that it does not need them." All the organs together make up the body of the Prince in the unity of the Spirit, and do each other a necessary service through their gifts. God has arranged the various parts of the body as he himself willed, but there exists among all of them a spiritual fellowship which makes it natural for them to share each other's feelings and be concerned for each other. "If one organ feels bad, all the others feel bad; if one organ receives honor, all of them are happy together." In addition, in the same way as parts are present in a single whole, each of us is in the Spirit, since all those who make up the one body have been bathed into the single Spirit.

The Son is seen in the Spirit in the same sense as the Father is seen in the Son. To worship in the Spirit, then, is to have our minds open to the light, as we learn from our Master's words to the Samaritan woman. Since she was misled by the tradition of her country, she imagined that it was necessary to worship in a certain place; but our Master gave her a different instruction. He told her that a person must worship in Spirit and in truth, and clearly by "truth" he meant himself.

As we speak of worship in the Son because the Son is the visible counterpart of God the Father, so we speak of worship in the Spirit because the Spirit is the manifestation of the divinity of the Master. Though the light of the Spirit we can see the Son, the radiance of God's glory, and through the Son, the very stamp of the Father, we are led to

the one who is the source both of his stamp, who is the Son, and of its seal, who is the Holy Spirit.

It is not the spirit of the world that we have received; it is the Spirit of God himself, so that we will know the gifts of God, because the Spirit penetrates the depths of everything, even the deep secrets of God.

God has now revealed in the Spirit to his holy Emissaries and prophets what no other human beings have known, because the Spirit penetrates the depths of everything, even the deep secrets of God.

Prayer

Master, please keep us true in the faith as we speak of your Son the Prince, who is one and the same as you in eternal glory, who became a human being and was born to a virgin mother; please free us from all harm and evil, and lead us to the joy of eternal life. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Colossians 3.5-16

So kill the parts of you that are earthly: casual sex, filthiness, passion, lust, and that greediness which is actually idolatry. These bring God's vengeance, and are the way you used to behave when you lived in them. But now take them all off: vengeance, anger, malice, cursing, and dirty language; don't lie to each other, because you have stripped off the human being you used to be with all of its properties, and have got dressed in a new humanity which keeps renewing itself in knowledge, following the pattern of its creator. Here there are no Greeks and Judeans, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigners, Scythians, slaves or free people; the Prince is everything and is in everyone.

And the point is that you are to dress yourselves in what is proper for

people chosen, sacred and loved by God: tenderness, kindness, humility, patience, and tolerance; put up with each other, and forgive anyone you have a grievance against; you are to forgive others in the way your Master forgave you. And over and above this put on love, which is the cord that ties perfection together.

And then the Prince's peace should govern your hearts; this is what you were called to when you all became a single body; be grateful for it. And what the Prince said ought to find a richly furnished home in you, as with all of his wisdom you teach and inform each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs which you sing with thankful hearts to God.

All those of you who have been bathed in the Prince have dressed yourselves in the Prince. Now all of us are one thing in Prince Jesus our Master.

No longer are we divided into Judean or Greek, slave or free, man or woman. All of us are one thing in Prince Jesus our Master.

Second Reading

A Treatise on John by St. Augustine

The Master, the teacher of love, came full of love in person "with summary judgment upon the world," as had been foretold of him, and showed that the law and the prophets are summed up in the two commandments of love.

Recall, my brothers and sisters, what these two commandments are. They ought to be very familiar to you; they should not only spring to mind when I mention them, they should never be out of your hearts. Keep always in mind that we must love God and our neighbors: "Love God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind, and your neighbor as much as yourself."

These two commandments must always be in your thoughts and your hearts, cherished, acted on, and fulfilled. Love of God is the first thing to be commanded, but love of neighbor is the first to be put into practice. In giving two commandments of love, the Prince would not call to your attention your neighbor first and then God, but first God and then your neighbor.

Since you do not yet see God, you come to deserve the vision of God

by loving your neighbors. By loving your neighbors, you prepare your eye to see God. St. John clearly says, "If you do not love your neighbor whom you see, how can you love God whom you do not see?"

Consider what is said to you: Love God. If you tell me, "Show me what I am to love," what shall I say except what St. John says: "No one has ever seen God"? But in case you think that you are completely cut off from the sight of God, he says, "God is love, and anyone who remains in love remains in God." Love your neighbor, then, and see within yourself the power by which you love your neighbor; and there you will see God, as far as you are able.

And so begin by loving your neighbor. "Serve your bread to the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; if you see someone naked, give him clothes, and do not look down on your own flesh and blood."

What will you gain by doing this? "Your light will shine out like the dawn." Your light is your God; he is your "dawn," because he will come to you when the night of time is over. He does not rise or set, but is the same forever.

In loving your neighbor and caring for him, you are on a journey. And where are you traveling, if not to God the Master, to the one we should love with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind? We have not yet reached his presence, but we have our neighbors at our side; and so support these companions in your pilgrimage, if you want to come into the presence of the one with whom you desire to remain forever.

God loved us first, and sent his own Son to be the sacrifice that removes our sin. And since God has loved us so much, we certainly should also love each other.

We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us. And since God has loved us so much, we certainly should also love each other.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your Son became like us in everything but sin when he was born to the Virgin Mary, may those of us who have been reborn in him be free from our sinful ways. We make this request

through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Weðnesðay

First Reading

Colossians 3.17-4.1

Do everything you do and say everything you say in the name of Master Jesus, and be grateful to God, his Father, through him.

Women are to listen to their husbands; this is what is proper in the Master. Men are to love their wives and not be harsh with them. Children are to obey their parents in everything; this is what their duty is in the Master. Parents are not to push their children too hard, or they might give up.

Slaves are to obey their material masters in everything; and the service is not simply to be performed only when they are looking, as if what the masters see were the only important thing; no, it is to be wholehearted, out of respect for your real Master. When you do something, put your whole soul into it, and do it for the Master and not men, because you know that the salary you earn will be an inheritance from the Master. You are to be slaves of Master Jesus, in fact; and he will pay dishonest service what it deserves, because he has no favorites.

Masters, be honest and fair with your slaves, because you know that you too have a Master in heaven.

Whatever you say and whatever you do, do it all in the name of Master Jesus.

Thank our God and Father through his Son; do it all in the name of Master Jesus.

Second Reading

*The Five Hundred Chapters
by St. Maximus the Confessor*

The Word of God, who was born once materially (this is how kind

and good he is), is always willing to be born spiritually in those who long for him. He is born in them as an infant as he fashions himself in them by their virtues. He reveals himself to the extent that he knows someone is capable of receiving him. He lessens the revelation of his glory, not out of selfishness, but because he recognizes the capacity and resources of those who desire to see him; and yet, in the transcendence of mystery, he always remains invisible to everyone.

And this is why the Emissary Paul, as he reflects on the power of the mystery, says, "Prince Jesus, yesterday and today; he remains the same forever." You see, he understands the mystery as always new, never growing old through our understanding of it.

The Prince is God, because he had given everything its existence out of nothing. Yet he is born as a man by taking into himself our nature, matter endowed with intelligent spirit. A star glistens during the day in the East, and leads the wise men to the place where the incarnate Word is lying, to show that the Word, which was contained in the Law and the Prophets, surpasses in a mystical way knowledge derived from the senses, and to lead the Gentiles to the full light of knowledge. That is, it is certainly true that the word of the Law and the prophets, when understood with faith, is like a star which leads those who are called by the power of grace in accordance with his decree to recognize the Word incarnate.

Here is the reason why God became a perfect human being, changing nothing of human nature, except to take away sin (which was never natural anyway). His flesh was set before that ravenous, gaping dragon as bait to provoke him: flesh that would be deadly for the dragon, because it would totally destroy him by the power of divinity hidden within it. But for human nature, his flesh was to be a remedy, since the power of divinity in it would restore human nature to its original favor.

Parallel to the way the devil had poisoned the tree of knowledge and spoiled our nature by its taste, he is corrupted himself in presuming to eat the Master's flesh, and is totally destroyed by the power of the divinity hidden within it.

The great mystery of the divine incarnation remains a mystery forever. How can the Word become flesh be essentially the same person that is

wholly with the Father? How can the one who is by nature God become by nature completely man without being bereft of either nature, neither the divine one by which he is God, nor the human one by which he became man?

It is only faith that grasps these mysteries; faith alone is the true reality and foundation of everything that goes beyond knowledge and understanding.

The Word became flesh and made his home among us; and we saw how great he was, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God's blessings and truth.

In the beginning, there was the Word, reason, the meaning of things; and the Word was face to face with God, and the word was God. And we saw how great he was, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God's blessings and truth.

Prayer

Omnipotent Father, since you sent your Son Prince Jesus to bring the new light of rescue into the world, may he please shine on us with his radiance, because he is the one who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Colossians 4.2-18

Be persistent in your praying; keep at it night and day with gratitude—and remember us sometimes in your prayers, and ask God to give us an opening for what we say as we talk about the Prince's secret—which is the reason I am in prison—so that I can reveal it as well as I ought to in what I say.

Behave wisely toward outsiders; take advantage of opportunities they offer. What you say should always be refined, and interesting to listen to; you should study how to adapt your conversation to different people.

Tychicus, our friend, brother, faithful servant and fellow-slave of the Master, will let you know all about me. This is the real reason I am sending him to you, to inform you about what we are and to give you support and encouragement. I am sending with him Onesimus, a faithful friend and brother, who is one of your countrymen. They will tell you all that is happening here.

Aristarchus, a prisoner with me, sends his regards, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have had instructions about him; if he comes, find a place for him to stay.) Jesus Justus also sends best wishes; he and Mark are the only converts from Judaism who work with me for God's kingdom; they have been a great comfort to me.

Your countryman Epaphras sends regards; he is constantly hard at work as the Prince's slave for you in his prayers to have you firm and mature and perfect in everything that God wishes you to be. I can tell you of my own knowledge how much work he does for you and for those in Laodicea and Hieropolis.

Our friend Luke the physician sends best wishes, and so does Demas.

Give our regards to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the community in her household.

When you have read this letter, please send it along to be read in the community at Laodicea, and ask for the one to Laodicea to be sent to you so that you can read it.

Tell this to Archippus: Take care of the service you have undertaken in the Master; be sure to complete it.

This salutation is in my own handwriting: *PAUL*.

Remember me in prison here in your prayers.

God's blessings on you.

Let us pray for each other that God will give us a chance to deliver the proclamation about the secret of the Prince.

May the Master open our lips to speak the praises of God, to deliver the proclamation about the secret of the Prince.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Augustine

What human being knows all the riches of wisdom and knowledge

hidden in the Prince, concealed in the poverty of his flesh? Scripture says, "Though he was rich, he became poor for us to enrich us by his poverty." He showed himself poor when he took on our mortal nature and destroyed death; yet he promised us riches, because had not been robbed of his wealth; he was keeping it in reserve.

There are such great blessings from his goodness which he keeps ready from those who hold him in reverence and shows to those who put their hopes in him. Until he gives them to us in their fullness, we can have only the faintest conception of them; but to enable us to receive these blessings, the one who is in his divine nature the equal of the Father took on the condition of a slave and became like us, and in so doing restored our likeness to God. The only Son of God became a son of man to make men sons of God. He taught slaves by revealing himself in the form of a slave, and now he makes free men able to see him in the form of God.

"Yes, we are the children of God, and though what we will be has not yet been revealed, we know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is." That is, what are those treasures of wisdom and knowledge if not the one thing that can fulfill our longing? What are the great blessings of his goodness, if not the one thing that will satisfy us? And so "Show us the Father, and that will be all we need."

The Prince speaks both in us and for us when, in one of the psalms, he says to the Father, "I will be satisfied when your glory is revealed." The reason is that he and the Father are one and the same thing, and anyone who is looking at him is seeing the Father. "The Master of armies is himself the King of glory." He will transform us and show us his face, and we will be saved; all our longing will be fulfilled, all our desires will be satisfied.

But this has not yet happened; he has not yet given us the vision that will satisfy every desire; we have not yet drunk our fill out of the fountain of life. So while all this remains in the future and we still walk in faith, away from the Master, while we are still hungry and thirsty for virtue and yearn with inexpressible longing for God's beauty, we should celebrate with reverence the day he was born into our own slavish condition.

Since we can form no conception as yet of his being fathered by the Father before the morning star, let us keep the festival of his birth to a virgin in the hours of the night. Since it is still beyond our understanding that “his name lasts forever and existed before the sun,” let us at least recognize “his residence” that he has placed “beneath the sun.” We cannot look on him as the only Son, living forever with the Father, and so let us recall his “coming out like a bridegroom from his chamber.” We are not yet ready for the Father’s banquet, and so let us contemplate the feed box for the animals in which our Master Prince Jesus rested.

This life became visible; we have seen it and we announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

We know that the Son of God has come and given us understanding, so that we could know the true God; because we are in his Son, Prince Jesus, who is true God and eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

Prayer

Father, since you make known the rescue of mankind at the birth of your Son, please make us strong in faith and bring us to the glory you promise. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

This is my servant, the one I support,
the one I chose, the one who pleases me,
the one on whom I placed my Spirit.

He will bring virtue upon the nations,
but not by ranting or shouting,

Isaiah 42.1-8

and without making his voice heard in the streets;
 he will break no reed that is bruised
 or quench a smoldering wick
 before he sets virtue firmly upon the earth;
 the shores will be eager for his teaching.
 This is what is said by God YHWH,
 who created the sky and spread it out
 and who stretched out the earth with its crops,
 who gives breath to its people
 and spirit to those who walk upon it:
 "I, YHWH, have called you to witness the triumph of virtue;
 I have taken you by the hand;
 I gave you form and set you here
 as a treaty for the people,
 a light for the nations,
 to open the eyes of the blind,
 to bring prisoners out of confinement,
 and those who live in darkness out of their dungeons.
 I am YHWH; this is my name,
 and I give my glory to no one else;
 and I yield no praise to idols.

This is my slave I have chosen; the one I love, who pleases me; every nation will have hope in his name.

My Spirit will rest upon him, and he will teach the nations the meaning of virtue; every nation will have hope in his name.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen

The Prince is bathed in light; we should also be bathed in light. The Prince is bathed in water; we should also go down with him, and come back out with him.

John is bathing people when Jesus approaches. Perhaps he comes to sanctify the one who is bathing him; but certainly, he comes to bury sinful humanity in the water. He comes to sanctify the Jordan for our sake and to prepare it for us; the one who is Spirit and matter comes to

begin a new creation through Spirit and water.

The Bather protests; Jesus insists. Then John says, “I ought to be being bathed by you.” He is the lamp in the presence of the sun, the voice in the presence of the Word, the friend in the presence of the Groom, the greatest of all who were born to woman in the presence of the firstborn of all creation, the one who leaped in his mother’s womb in the presence of the one who was worshiped while in the womb, the forerunner and future forerunner in the presence of the one who has now come and is also to come again. “I ought to be being bathed by you” and we should add, “and for you,” because John is going to be bathed in blood, washed clean like the Rock, but not merely by the washing of his feet.

Jesus rises out of the water, and the world rises with him. Heaven, like Paradise with its flaming sword, closed by Adam for himself and his descendants, is torn open. The Spirit comes to him as to an equal, and gives evidence of his divinity. A voice presents testimony to him from heaven, his place of origin. The Spirit comes down in bodily form like the dove that so long before announced the end of the flood, and so gives honor to the body that is one and the same thing as God.

Today, then, let us do honor to the Prince’s bath and celebrate this feast in holiness. Make yourselves totally clean and stay clean. Nothing gives as much pleasure to God as the return and the rescue of human beings, for whom every word of his and every revelation exist. He wants you to become a living force for all mankind, to be lights shining in the world. You are to be gleaming lights as you stand beside the Prince, the great light, bathed in the radiance of the one who is the light of heaven. You are to enjoy more and more the pure and dazzling light of the Trinity, as now you have received—even if not fully—a ray of his splendor, emanating from the one God, in our Master Prince Jesus, to whom be glory and power through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Today the sky opened up, and the water of the sea became sweet and fragrant; the earth was overjoyed, the mountains and hills leaped with happiness, because the Prince was bathed by John in the Jordan.

What happened that the sea ran away, and the Jordan turned back on

itself? Because the Prince was bathed by John in the Jordan.

Prayer

Master, please fill our hearts with your light, and have us always acknowledge the Prince as our Savior and be more faithful to his good news; because he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 61.1-11

The Spirit of God is upon me,
 because YHWH has anointed me
 to deliver a proclamation of good news for the poor,
 to heal those with broken hearts,
 to announce to captives that they are free,
 and to open prisons for those chained in them,
 to herald the year of YHWH's acceptance,
 and the day our God takes his vengeance;
 to comfort people who are grieving,
 to console those in Zion who are in mourning:
 to give them beauty to replace their ashes,
 the oil of happiness to replace their grief,
 clothes of praise to replace their depression,
 so that they will be called trees of virtue
 planted by YHWH for his own glory.
 And they will rebuild the old ruins,
 they will reconstruct what used to be desolate;
 they will repair the ruined cities,
 those abandoned for many generations.
 Foreigners will stand by to guard your flocks,
 and children of aliens
 will be your plowmen and vinedressers;

while you will be called priests of YHWH,
 and they will think of you as our God's slaves.
 You will eat the riches of the Gentiles
 and will bask in their glory.
 Instead of shame, you will have twice as much respect,
 and in place of consternation, they will be happy with their share.
 And that is why they will have twice as much in their own lands,
 and enjoy life forever.
 Because I, YHWH, love virtue;
 I hate stolen burnt offerings.
 I will direct their work in the truth,
 and will conclude an everlasting Treaty with them.
 Their descendants will be famous among the Gentiles,
 and their offspring well-known among all peoples.
 Everyone who sees them will recognize them,
 and know that they are the posterity YHWH blessed.
 I will be ecstatic with my joy in YHWH;
 my soul will brim over with happiness in my God,
 because he has dressed me in clothes of rescue,
 and covered me with a robe of virtue,
 in the way a bridegroom dresses himself with finery
 and a bride adorns herself with jewels.
 Yes, just as the earth produces buds,
 and as the garden makes what is planted spring up,
 Master YHWH will make virtue
 and praise spring up in the presence of the nations.

God's spirit rests on me, because the Master has anointed me, and has
 sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, and
 to announce that captivity is now ended and prisoners are set free.

I have come from God and entered the world; and I did not come by
 myself; the Father sent me to heal the broken-hearted, and to announce
 that captivity is now ended and prisoners are set free.

*Second Reading**A Sermon by St. Augustine*

My friends, our Master Prince Jesus, the eternal creator of everything, has become our Savior today by being born from a mother. He was born for us today by his own free will, in time, so that he could lead us to the Father's eternity. God became man so man could become God. The Master of angels became man today so that man could eat the bread of angels.

Today, there is the fulfillment of the prophesy that said, "Pour down, heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the one who is virtuous; have the earth open up and bring out a savior." The Master who had created everything is himself created now, so that the one who was lost would be found. In this way man acknowledges, in the words of the psalmist, "Before I was brought down, I sinned." Man sinned and became guilty; God is born a man to free man from his guilt. Man fell, but God came down; man fell miserably, but God came down with mercy; man fell through pride, and God came down with his grace.

My brothers and sisters, what miracles these are! What astounding things! The laws of nature have changed for human beings. God is born. A virgin becomes pregnant with a man. The Word of God marries a woman who has no contact with a man; and she is now at one and the same time mother and virgin. She becomes a mother, but remains a virgin. The virgin bears a son, and yet she has no contact with a man; she remains untouched, yet she is not barren. He alone was born without sin, because she bore him without embracing a man, not by the desire of the flesh, but by the obedience of a mind.

We have seen this with our own eyes, and are swearing to it. The Father sent his own Son to be the Savior of the world.

He has come to remove the burden of our sins and to wash us clean of every stain of evil. The Father sent his own Son to be the Savior of the world.

Prayer

Omnipotent and eternal God, since you give us a new vision of your glory in the coming of your Son the Prince, who was born from the

virgin Mary and came to share our life, may we come to share his eternal life in the glory of your Kingdom, where he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



*First Reading**Isaiah 60.1-22*

Stand up, shine,
 because your light has come
 and YHWH's glory has risen upon you.
 And yes, darkness will cover the earth
 and pitch-blackness surround the people;
 but YHWH will rise over you
 and his glory will shine on you.
 Gentiles will come to your light
 and kings will be attracted to the brightness of your rising.
 Raise your eyes all around, and look:
 they are all gathering, and coming to you;
 your sons will come from far off,
 and your daughters will be nursed at your side.
 Then you will see, and glow,
 and your hearts will swell with joy,
 because the riches of the sea will be given to you
 and the Gentiles' wealth will come to you.
 Throngs of camels will cover your land,
 dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;
 Everyone in Sheba will come
 bringing gold and incense,
 and singing the praises of YHWH.
 All the flocks from Kedar will be brought together to you;
 rams from Nebaioth will be sacrificed to you;

they will go up to my altar, at which they will be accepted,
and I will shine my glory into my glorious house.
Who are these people flying along like clouds,
like doves coming home to roost?
They are ships from Tarshish, coming at the front
to bring your children from far away,
carrying their silver and gold on them
in the name of your God YHWH,
the Holy One of Israel,
because he has given you glory.
Children of foreigners will build your walls,
and their kings will be your servants;
because I struck you down in my anger,
but I have had mercy on you because of my favor.
And that is why your gates will always be open—
not shut day or night—
so that people will bring you the wealth of the Gentiles,
with their kings leading the procession;
because the nation and kingdom not serving you will disappear;
those nations will be completely destroyed.
The glory of Lebanon will come to you:
cypress, pine, and box trees,
to beautify the place I make my sanctuary;
and I will make glorious where I place my feet.
And the children of those who tormented you
will come bowing down before you,
and everyone who despised you will fall prostrate at your feet;
and they will call you YHWH's city,
the Holy One of Israel's Zion.
And since you have been abandoned and hated,
so that no one went through you,
I will make you into the pride of eternity,
the joy of generation after generation.
You will drink the milk of the Gentiles
and milk the breasts of kings;

you will know that I, YHWH, the Mighty One of Jacob,
am your savior and your redeemer.
Instead of bronze, I will bring gold;
instead of iron, I will bring silver;
instead of wood, bronze,
and instead of stones, iron.
I will make peace your governor
and virtue your official.
Violence will no longer be heard in your land,
and neither will looting or destruction be within your borders;
you will call your walls, "Preservation,"
and your gates, "Praise."
The sun will no longer be your light in the day,
and the moon will no longer give you its brightness;
YHWH will be an eternal light for you,
and your God will illuminate you.
Your sun will never set
and the moon will never wane,
because YHWH will be your light forever,
and the days of your mourning will end.
And your people will all be virtuous;
they will inherit the land forever.
They are the branch I planted,
the work of my hands
so that I will be glorified.
The small one will become a thousand,
and a little one will become a great nation;
I, YHWH, will bring it about quickly when its time comes.

Stand up and shine, Jerusalem, because your light now has come; the
radiance of your God has risen upon you.

All the nations will walk about in your brightness, and kings will go
in the splendor of your dawn; the radiance of your God has risen upon
you.

*Second Reading**A Sermon by St. Leo the Great*

The loving providence of God brought it about that in the last days he would help the world which was set on a course to ruin. He decreed that every nation would be saved in the Prince.

A promise had been made to the holy patriarch Abraham about these nations; he was to have a countless progeny, born not from his body but from the seed of faith; and so his descendants are compared with the army of the stars. The father of nations was to hope for offspring from above, not for earthly issue.

May the complete number of nations now take their places in the family of the patriarchs; the children of the promise should now receive the blessing of the offspring of Abraham, the blessing his physical descendants rejected. In the persons of the Wise Men, every people should adore the Creator of the universe; God is to be known in the whole world, not just in Judea, so that "his name will be great in all of Israel."

Dear friends, now that we have received instruction in this revelation of God's favor, we should celebrate with spiritual joy the day of our first harvesting and of the first calling of the Gentiles. We should show our gratitude to the God of mercy, "who has given us the privilege," in the words of the Emissary, "to share the position of the sacred people in light, who has rescued us from the power of darkness, and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves." As Isaiah prophesied, "The people of the Gentiles, who lived in darkness, have seen a great light; and those whose home is in the realm of the shadow of death have had a light dawn upon them." He spoke of them to the Master: "The Gentiles, who do not know you, will call upon your name, and the peoples who were ignorant of you will take refuge in you."

This is "the day that Abraham saw, and when he saw it it made him glad," when he knew that the sons born from his faith would be blessed in his offspring—or in other words, in the Prince. Since he believed that he would be the father of the nations, he looked into the future, "giving glory to God, in full awareness that God is able to do what he has promised."

This is the day that David prophesied in the psalms, when he said,

“All the nations that you have brought into being will come and fall down in adoration in your presence, Master, and give glory to your name.” Again, “the Master has made his rescue known; he has revealed his virtue in the sight of the nations.”

This came to be fulfilled, as we know, from the time when the star beckoned the three Wise Men out of their distant country and led them to recognize and adore the King of heaven and earth. The obedience of the star calls on us to imitate its humble service: to be servants, as best we can, of the grace that invites everyone to find the Prince.

Dear friends, you must have the same zeal to help each other; and then, in the Kingdom of God, to which faith and good works are the way, you will shine as children of the light, through our Master Prince Jesus, who is alive and reigning with God the Father and the Holy Spirit through all the ages of ages. Amen.

This is the glorious day on which the Prince himself, the savior of the world, appeared; the prophets foretold him, the angels worshiped him; the Wise Men saw his star and were glad to lay their treasures at his feet.

God’s holy day has dawned for us at last; come, all you peoples, and worship the Master; the Wise men saw his star and were glad to lay their treasures at his feet.

Prayer

Father, since you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, please lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Epiphany to The MASTER'S Bath

Monday

First Reading

Isaiah 61.1-11

The Spirit of God is upon me,
because YHWH has anointed me
to deliver a proclamation of good news for the poor,
to heal those with broken hearts,
to announce to captives that they are free,
and to open prisons for those chained in them,
to herald the year of YHWH's acceptance,
and the day our God takes his vengeance;
to comfort people who are grieving,
to console those in Zion who are in mourning:
to give them beauty to replace their ashes,
the oil of happiness to replace their grief,
clothes of praise to replace their depression,
so that they will be called trees of virtue
planted by YHWH for his own glory.
And they will rebuild the old ruins,
they will reconstruct what used to be desolate;
they will repair the ruined cities,
those abandoned for many generations.
Foreigners will stand by to guard your flocks,
and children of aliens
will be your plowmen and vinedressers;
while you will be called priests of YHWH,
and they will think of you as our God's slaves.
You will eat the riches of the Gentiles
and will bask in their glory.
Instead of shame, you will have twice as much respect,
and in place of consternation, they will be happy with their share.
And that is why they will have twice as much in their own lands,
and enjoy life forever.

Because I, YHWH, love virtue;
 I hate stolen burnt offerings.
 I will direct their work in the truth,
 and will conclude an everlasting Treaty with them.
 Their descendants will be famous among the Gentiles,
 and their offspring well-known among all peoples.
 Everyone who sees them will recognize them,
 and know that they are the posterity YHWH blessed.
 I will be ecstatic with my joy in YHWH;
 my soul will brim over with happiness in my God,
 because he has dressed me in clothes of rescue,
 and covered me with a robe of virtue,
 in the way a bridegroom dresses himself with finery
 and a bride adorns herself with jewels.
 Yes, just as the earth produces buds,
 and as the garden makes what is planted spring up,
 Master YHWH will make virtue
 and praise spring up in the presence of the nations.

The Spirit of God rests upon me, because the Master has anointed me;
 he has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-
 hearted, to announce that captivity is now ended and prisoners are set
 free.

I have come from God and entered the world; and I did not come by
 myself; the Father sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to announce that
 captivity is now ended and prisoners are set free.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus

In the mystery of our Master's incarnation there were clear indications of
 his eternal divinity; but the great events we celebrate today disclose and
 reveal in different ways the fact that it was God himself who took a
 human body. Mortal man, shrouded always in darkness, must not be left
 in ignorance, and in this way be deprived of what he can understand and
 grasp only by grace.

In choosing to be born for us, God chose to be known by us. And

so he reveals himself in this way so that this great sacrament of his love will not be an occasion of serious misunderstanding for us.

Today the Wise Men find crying in a manger the one they followed as he shone in the sky. Today the Wise Men see clearly, wrapped in a blanket, the one they have long waited for as he lay hidden among the stars. Today the Wise Men gaze in deep amazement at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot hold now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question their belief, as their symbolic gifts testify: incense for God, gold for a king, and myrrh for one who is to die.

So the Gentiles, who were last, become the first: the faith of the Wise Men is the firstfruits of the belief of the Gentiles.

Today the Prince enters the Jordan to wash sin off the world. John himself testifies that this is why he came: "Here is God's lamb; here is the one who rids the world of its sins." Today a slave lays his hand on the Master, a man lays his hand on God, John lays his hand on the Prince, but not to forgive him, but to receive forgiveness.

Today, as the psalmist prophesied, "The voice of the Master is heard above the water." What does the voice say? "This is my Son, the one I love, one with whom I am pleased."

Today the Holy Spirit hovers over the water in the form of a dove. A dove announced to Noah that the flood had disappeared from the earth; and now a dove is to reveal that the world's shipwreck is at an end forever. The sign is no longer the olive twig from the old stock; instead, the Spirit pours out on the Prince's head the full richness of a new anointing by the Father, to fulfill what the psalmist had prophesied: "And so God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows."

Today the Prince performs the first of his signs from heaven by turning the water into wine. But water has still to be changed into the sacrament of his blood, so that the Prince will be able to offer a spiritual drink from the cup of his body, to fulfill the psalmist's prophesy: "How wonderful is my cup, warming my spirit."

The Wise Men offered three precious gifts to the Master on that day, and

each of these gifts has a divine significance: Gold signifies the power of a king, frankincense, the office of high priest, and myrrh, the Master's burial.

The Wise Men came to the stable to worship the source of our rescue, and from their treasures they offered these symbolic gifts: Gold signifies the power of a king, frankincense, the office of high priest, and myrrh, the Master's burial.

Prayer

Master, please let the light of your glory shine inside us and lead us through the darkness of this world to the radiant joy of our eternal home. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the endless ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 62.1-12

For Zion's sake I will not be silent,
 and I will not rest for Jerusalem's sake,
 until her virtue shines out like the dawn
 and her rescue becomes a burning lamp.
 The Gentiles will see your virtue
 and every king will look upon your glory;
 you will have a new name
 which YHWH's mouth will pronounce.
 You will also be a shining winner's wreath
 in YHWH's hand,
 a royal crown
 in the hand of your God.
 You will no longer be called "Abandoned"
 and your country will be named "Desolate" no more;
 you will be called Hephzibah, "My Delight,"

and your land, Beulah, "Wedded,"
because YHWH finds pleasure in you
and your land will be married.
Yes, in the way a young man marries a maiden,
your sons will marry you;
and in the way a groom enjoys his bride,
your sons will enjoy you.
I have put watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;
they will never be quiet, day or night.
Those of you who invoke YHWH, do not be silent,
and give him no rest until he restores Jerusalem
and makes it the pride of the earth.
YHWH has sworn by his right hand
and by the arm that is his strength
"I am determined not to give your grain
as food for your enemies
and the children of aliens will not drink your new wine
that you worked so hard for;
those who have harvested it will eat the grain
and praise YHWH,
and those who collected the grapes
will drink it in my holy courts."
Go through the gates; pass through them;
prepare a path for the people.
Build up a highway; build it up,
take out the stones,
and raise a banner for the nations.
Yes, YHWH has issued this proclamation
to the end of the world:
"Say to Zion, my daughter,
Your rescuer is certainly coming;
yes, and he has his payment with him,
and his work goes before him."
And his people will be called The Holy People,
those YHWH redeemed;

and you will be called "Frequented,"
a city that has not been left behind.

The nations will see your virtue, and every king will look on your glory;
and the Master will himself give you a new name for you to be called by.

You will be a radiant winner's-wreath in the Master's hand, and a
royal crown in the hand of your God. And the Master will himself give
you a new name for you to be called by.

Second Reading

*A Sermon on the Epiphany
attributed to St. Hippolytus*

That Jesus would come and be bathed by John is certainly something
that should amaze us. To think of the infinite river that gladdens the city
of God being bathed in a poor little creek of what is eternal; the
bottomless fountain that gives life to every human being being sunk into
the shallow water of this transitory world! The one who fills all of
creation, who leaves no place empty of his presence, the one who is
incomprehensible to angels and hidden from human sight came to be
bathed because it was his will. And "then the skies opened and a voice
said, 'This is my Son, the one I love, the one who pleases me.'"

The Father who is loved sires love, and spiritual light gives birth to
inaccessible light. In his divine nature, he is my only Son, though he was
known as the son of Joseph. "This is my Son, the one I love." Though
he is hungry himself, he feeds thousands; though he is tired, he refreshes
those who are laboring. He has no place to lay his head, yet he holds all
creation in his hand. By his suffering, inflicted on him by others, he frees
us from the passions unleashed by our disobedience; by receiving a slap
on his cheek, he gives the world its freedom; by being pierced in the side,
he heals the wound of Adam.

I ask you now to pay close attention, because I want to return to that
fountain of life and contemplate its healing water at its source. The
Father of immortality sent his immortal Son and Word into the world;
he came to us human beings to wash us clean with water and the Spirit.
To give us a new birth that would make our bodies and souls immortal,
he breathed into us the Spirit of life, and armed us with incorruptibility.

Now if we become immortal, we will also be divine; and if we become divine after rebirth in the bath through water and the Holy Spirit, we will also be coheirs with the Prince after the return to life of the dead.

And so, I will cry out in the way a herald does, Peoples of every nation are to come and receive the immortality that flows from the Bath. This is the water that is linked to the Spirit, the water that irrigates Paradise, makes the earth fertile, gives growth to plants, and brings animals to birth—in short, this is the water by which a human being receives new birth and life, the water in which even the Prince was bathed, the water into which the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

Whoever goes down into this water of rebirth with faith renounces the devil and pledges himself to the Prince. He repudiates the enemy and acknowledges that the Prince is God, he throws off his slavery and is raised to the status of a son. He comes up from the bath as radiant as the sun, resplendent in his purity; but above all, he comes out as a son of God and a coheir with the Prince. Glory and power now and through the ages of ages to him and his most holy, life-giving Spirit. Amen.

I saw the Spirit coming down from the sky like a dove and lighting on him. I saw this, and so I can swear that he is the Son of God.

The one who sent me to bathe you in water said to me, “The one on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest upon is the one who will bathe people in the Holy Spirit. And I saw this, and so I can swear that he is the Son of God.

Prayer

Father, since your Son became like us when he revealed himself in our nature, please help us to become like him, as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.


 Wednesday
*First Reading**Isaiah 63.7-19*

I will go over the favors YHWH has bestowed
 and YHWH's glorious deeds,
 since YHWH has done so much for us,
 and has shown such goodness toward the family of Israel;
 he has bestowed this on them because of his mercy,
 consistently with his tender love.
 He said, "Yes, they are my people,
 children who are not disloyal."
 So he became their savior;
 he shared all their suffering,
 and his very presence was the messenger that saved them;
 he redeemed them in his own love and pity.
 He lifted them up and carried them
 in all the days of ancient times.
 But they rebelled and made his Holy Spirit grieve,
 and so he turned against them as if they were enemies,
 and fought with them.
 But then he remembered the ancient times,
 and his slave Moses, and said,
 "Where is the one who brought them out of the sea
 with the shepherd of his flock?
 Where is the one who put his Holy Spirit into them,
 who led them by the right hand of Moses,
 with his glorious arm,
 dividing the water in front of them,
 to make himself an everlasting name;
 who led them through the ocean
 the way a horse is led through the wild country
 so that they would not trip and fall?"
 It was in the same way that an animal goes into the valley
 and YHWH's spirit makes him take rest,

that you led your people
 to make a glorious name for yourself.
 Please look down from heaven
 and see us from your holy, glorious residence.
 Where are your zeal and your strength,
 the longing of your heart and your mercies toward me?
 Are they tied up?
 Because you certainly are our Father,
 though Abraham knew nothing of us
 and Israel does not recognize us.
 You, YHWH, are our Father;
 your name is our Redeemer from Eternity.
 YHWH, why have you made us wander off your paths
 and hardened our hearts to fear of you?
 Return to us, for your slaves' sake,
 for the tribes that are your heritage.
 Your holy people possessed the land for such a short time,
 and our enemies have trampled on your sanctuary.
 We have become like the ancient people you never ruled,
 people never called by your name.
 If only you would tear the sky open
 and come down
 with the mountains quaking before you!

Master, we are like people you never ruled, people never called by your
 name. If only you would tear the sky open and come down!

We have yearned for virtue and there is none; because rescue is kept
 far from us. If only you would tear the sky open and come down!

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Proclus of Constantinople

The Prince appeared in the world, and by bringing beauty out of
 disorder, he gave it luster and joy. He carried the world's sin and crushed
 the world's enemy. He sanctified the springs of water and enlightened
 men's minds. He wove even greater miracles into the tapestry of miracles.

Yes, on this day land and sea share between them the Savior's favor,

and the whole world is filled with joy. Today's feast of the Epiphany shows even more wonders than the feast of Christmas.

On the feast of the Savior's birth, the earth found joy because it carried its Master in a manger; but on today's feast of the Epiphany, it is the sea that is happy and leaps for joy; it is happy because it receives the blessing of holiness in the river Jordan.

At Christmas we saw a weak baby, giving proof of our weakness. In today's feast, we see a complete man, hinting at the perfect Son who proceeds from the all-perfect Father. At Christmas, the King puts on the royal robe of his body; at Epiphany the very source of water enfolds and, so to speak, clothes the river.

So come and see new and astounding miracles: the Sun of Virtue washing in the Jordan, fire immersed in water, God sanctified by the service of a human being.

Today every creature shouts in a resounding song: "Praise the one who is coming in the Master's name!" Praise the one who comes in every age, because this is not his first coming.

And who is he? Tell us more clearly, please, blessed David: "The Master is God, and has shone upon us." David is not alone in prophesying this; the Emissary Paul adds his own testimony, when he says, "The favor of God has appeared bringing rescue to every human being, and teaching us." It was not to some human beings, it was to all of them: God bestows rescue through the Bath to Greeks as well as Judeans, and offers the Bath as the same favor for everyone.

So come and contemplate this new, marvelous deluge, which is greater and more important than the flood in Noah's time. Then the water of the flood destroyed the human race; but now the water of the Bath has recalled the dead to life by the power of the one who was bathed. In the days of the flood, the dove with an olive branch in its beak foreshadowed the fragrance of the good odor of the Prince our Master; now the Holy Spirit, coming in the likeness of a dove, reveals the Master of mercy.

Today Jesus, Light from Light, whom John bathed in the Jordan, has appeared to us; we believe that he was born from the Virgin Mary.

The sky opened above him, and the Father's voice was heard. We believe that he was born from the Virgin Mary.

Prayer

Dear God, light of every nation, please give us the joy of lasting peace and fill us with your radiance as you filled the hearts of our fathers. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 64.1-11

If only you would tear apart the heavens
and come down
and make the mountains quake at your presence,
like a fire burning through brush,
a fire so hot water boils;
and this would make your enemies know your name,
and nations tremble before you,
as you performed miracles we did not expect.
In fact, since the beginning of the world
people have not heard or had it enter their ears,
and no eye has seen any God besides you
doing such deeds for those who are waiting for him.
You come to meet anyone who is happy and virtuous
and who remembers you and lives in your ways;
but you are very angry, because we have sinned,
and we continue in our sins,
and need to be saved.
We are like filth;
all our good deeds are simply dirty rags;
we are withering up like leaves

and our misbehavior, like the wind,
 is carrying us away;
 and there is no one who calls on your name,
 or rouses himself to cling to you,
 because you have hidden your face from us
 and have eaten us up for our misdeeds.
 But now, YHWH,
 you are our Father;
 we are the clay and you the potter,
 and we are all the work your hands produced.
 Please do not be enraged, YHWH,
 or remember our guilt forever.
 Please, look upon us; we are all your people,
 and your holy cities are a wasteland;
 Zion is a desert,
 Jerusalem is a ruin.
 Our holy, beautiful Temple
 where our fathers gave you praise
 has been burned to the ground,
 and everything we used to enjoy is demolished.
 Can you hold back, YHWH, after all this?
 Can you remain silent and torture us this much?

Jerusalem, your rescue is coming swiftly; why are you eaten up with
 sorrow? Has your pain come back now that you have no one to advise
 you? I will save you and set you free; do not be afraid.

Because I am the Master, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your
 Redeemer. I will save you and set you free; do not be afraid.

Second Reading

*A Commentary on John
by St. Cyril of Alexandria*

The Creator of the universe, in a plan of extraordinary beauty, decreed
 the renewal of everything in the Prince. In his design for restoring human
 nature to its original condition, he gave a promise that he would pour
 out on it the Holy Spirit along with his other gifts, because otherwise our

nature could not take possession of those gifts once again.

And so, he chose a time for the Holy Spirit to come upon us; and this was the time of the Prince's coming. He gave this promise when he said, "In those days," that is, the Savior's days, "I would pour out some of my Spirit on all mankind."

When the time came for this great act of gratuitous generosity, which revealed among us the only Son God ever fathered dressed in flesh, a man born from woman, as Scripture predicted, God the Father gave the Spirit once again. The Prince, as the firstfruits of our restored nature, was the first to receive the Spirit; and John the Bather gave evidence of this when he said, "I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven and lighting on him."

The Prince "received the Spirit" insofar as he was man, and insofar as man could receive the Spirit. He did so in such a way that, though he is the Son of God the Father, sired from his reality even before the incarnation—in fact before time began—he was not insulted at hearing the Father say to him after he had become man, "You are my Son; today I have become your sire."

The Father says of the Prince, who was God, sired by him before time began, that he has been "sired today," because the Father is to accept us in the Prince as his adopted children. The whole of our nature is present in the Prince, insofar as he is man. So the Father can be said to give the Spirit again to the Son, though the Son possesses the Spirit as his own, so that we can receive the Spirit in the Prince. And that is why the Son took upon himself the descendancy from Abraham, as Scripture says, and became like his brothers and sisters in everything.

The only Son God ever Fathered receives the Spirit, but not for his own benefit, because the Spirit is his, and is given in him and through him, as we have already said. He receives it to renew our nature in its completeness and to make it whole again, since in becoming man he took our entire nature upon himself. If we reason correctly, and also use the evidence of Scripture, we can see that the Prince did not receive the Spirit for himself, but instead for us in him; because it is also through the Prince that every gift comes down to us.

I will be their God and they will be my people; the nations will know that I am the Master, the Sanctifier of Israel, when my holiness will be established among them for all eternity.

I will bring to fulfillment my new Treaty with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; the nations will know that I am the Master, the Sanctifier of Israel, when my holiness will be established among them for all eternity.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since the hope of eternal life dawned on our world through your Son the Prince, please give us the light of faith, so that we will always acknowledge him as our Redeemer and come to the glory of his Kingdom, where he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 65.13-25

This is what is said by YHWH:

“My slaves will now eat,
 but you will go hungry;
 now my slaves will drink,
 but you will stay thirsty;
 my slaves will now be happy,
 and you will be disgraced;
 my slaves will sing in the joy of their hearts,
 and you will scream in your heart’s anguish,
 and sob out the grief in your spirit.
 You will leave your name to my chosen people as a curse,
 because God YHWH will slaughter you
 and call his slaves by another name;
 so that a person who blesses himself on the earth
 will bless himself in the God of truth;

because the troubles that once were are forgotten,
 and because they are concealed from my sight.
 You see, now I am creating a new sky and a new earth,
 and the old ones will not be remembered or thought of.
 So be happy and enjoy forever what I am creating,
 because I am now creating Jerusalem for joy.
 I will find my pleasure in Jerusalem
 and my happiness in my people;
 the sound of weeping will no longer be heard in her,
 nor will there be the noise of sobs.
 An infant there will no longer live only days;
 nor will an old man not have lived his life to the full;
 one who dies at a hundred years will die a child;
 but a hundred-year-old sinner will feel the curse.
 The people will build houses they will live in;
 they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
 They will not build anything for someone else to inhabit,
 they will not plant what someone else eats;
 because my people will age like trees,
 and my chosen ones will enjoy for ages what their own hands did.
 They will not work with no result,
 or give birth to children for trouble,
 because they will be offspring of those YHWH has blessed,
 and so will their own children.
 I will bring it about
 that I will answer them before they call;
 and I will listen while they are still speaking.
 Wolves and lambs will forage together,
 and lions eat hay like oxen,
 but snakes will still eat dirt.
 There will be no pain or destruction
 on all my holy mountain," says YHWH.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and I heard a voice from heaven,
 which said, "This is God's residence among human beings; and he will

make his home with them.”

The Master will wipe every tear from their eyes; death will no longer have control of them, because everything that used to exist has disappeared. This is God’s residence among human beings, and he will make his home with them.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Maximus of Turin

The Good News tells us that the Master went to the Jordan River to be bathed and that he wished to consecrate himself in the river by signs from heaven.

Reason demands that this feast of the Master’s Bath, which I think should be called the feast of his birthday, should follow soon after the Master’s birthday, during the same season, even though many years intervened between the two events.

At Christmas he was born a man; today he is reborn sacramentally. Then he was born from a Virgin; today he is born in mystery. When he was born a man, his mother Mary held him close to her heart; when he is born in mystery, God the Father embraces him with his voice when he says, “This is my Son, the one I love, one with whom I am very pleased; listen to him.” The mother caresses the tender baby on her lap; the Father serves his Son by his loving testimony. The mother holds the child for the Wise Men to adore; the Father reveals that his Son is to be worshiped by every nation.

That is why Master Jesus went to the river for the Bath, and that is why he wanted his holy body to be washed with Jordan’s water.

Someone might ask why a holy man would want a Bath; listen to the answer: The Prince is bathed, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy, and by his cleansing to purify the water which he touched. You see, the consecration of the Prince involves a more significant consecration of the water.

That is, when the Savior is washed, all water for our Bath is made clean, purified at its source for the dispensing of the grace of the Bath to the people of future ages. The Prince is the first to be bathed, then, so that Christians will follow him with confidence.

I understand the mystery in this way: The column of fire went before

the descendants of Israel through the Red Sea so that they could follow on their brave journey; the column went through the water first to prepare a path for those who followed. As the Emissary Paul said, what was accomplished then was the mystery of the Bath. Clearly, it was a Bath in some sense when the cloud was covering the people and bringing them through the water.

But our Master the Prince does all this: in the column of fire, he went through the sea before the descendants of Israel; now in the column of his body, he goes through the Bath before the Christian people. At the time of the Exodus, the column provided light for the people who followed; now it gives light to the hearts of believers. Then it made a firm pathway through the water; now it strengthens the footsteps of faith in the Bath of Baptism.

John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "That man is God's Lamb; he is the one who has rid the world of its sin."

He will make many, many people virtuous and will carry our sins himself. He is the one who has rid the world of its sin.

Prayer

Omnipotent Father, since you have made known the birth of the Savior by the light of a star, may he please continue to guide us with his light, as he is living and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

SATURDAY

First Reading

Isaiah 66.10-14, 18-23

"Congratulate Jerusalem,
and celebrate with her, all of those of you who love her;
Be happy with her joy, those who were mourning for her,
so you will feed yourselves and become full
with comfort from her breasts;

drink deep and enjoy yourselves
 from the wealth of her glory.
 I will bring peace over her like a flooding river,
 and the prosperity of the nations will come in a flowing stream,
 and then you will feed upon her
 as she carries you in her arms
 and fondles you in her lap,
 in the way a mother soothes her son,
 I will soothe you,
 and you will find your comfort in Jerusalem.
 When you see this, your hearts will overflow with joy,
 and your bodies flourish like grass;
 YHWH's power will be known by his slaves,
 and his enemies will feel his rage.
 I will gather every nation and language, and they will come here and see
 my glory. I will put a symbol among them, and I will send those who
 have escaped to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal,
 and Javan, to the distant shores who have not heard my reputation or
 seen my glory; and they will tell of it among the Gentiles. Then they will
 bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to
 YHWH, on horses, in chariots, on litters, on mules, and on camels to my
 holy mountain Jerusalem," says YHWH, "in the same way the descen-
 dants of Israel bring undefiled utensils into YHWH's house; and I will
 also take some of them for priests and Levites," says YHWH.
 "Your descendants and your name will stay
 as long as the new sky and new earth
 I am to make will remain in my presence;
 from one New Moon to the next,
 from one Sabbath to the next,
 everything material will come to give worship in my presence,"
 says YHWH.

 Now I am coming to bring together every nation and language; they will
 come and see my glory and tell of it to far-off lands.
 I have revealed your name to those you gave me out of the world; I

now send them as you sent me. They will come and see my glory and tell of it to far-off lands.

Second Reading

A Sermon by Faustus of Riez

“Two days later there was a wedding.” What wedding could this be but the happy marriage of man’s rescue, a marriage celebrated by acknowledging the Trinity or by faith in the return to life of Jesus. That is why the marriage took place “on the third day,” which is a reference to the sacred mysteries which this number symbolizes.

This is also why we read elsewhere in the Good News that the return of the younger son—that is, the conversion of the pagans—is marked by song, music, and wedding clothes.

Our God descended to earth in his incarnation “like a bridegroom coming from his wedding chamber,” so that he would be united to his Church, which was to be formed from the pagan nations. He gave her a pledge and a dowry: a pledge when God was united to human beings; a dowry when he was sacrificed to rescue mankind. The pledge is our present redemption; the dowry is eternal life.

To those who can only see with material eyes, all these events at Cana are strange and wonderful; to those who have understanding, they are also signs. You see, if we look closely, the water tells us of our rebirth in the Bath; one thing is turned into another from within, and in a hidden way a lesser creature is turned into a greater one. All this points to the hidden reality of our second birth; there, water was changed; later it will cause a change in human beings.

By the Prince’s action in Galilee, then, wine is made; that is, the law yields and grace takes its place; the shadows vanish and truth is there; material realities are coupled with spiritual ones, and the old Treaty with its outward regulations is transformed into the new one. As the Emissary says, “The old order has gone away; now, everything is new.” The water in the jars is not less than it was before; but it now begins to be what it had not been. In the same way, the Law was not destroyed by the Prince’s coming, but was made better than it was.

When the wine runs out, new wine is served: the wine of the old

Treaty was good, but the wine of the new one is better. The old Treaty, which the Jews follow, is totally summed up in its letter; the new Treaty, which belongs to us, has the taste of life and is filled with grace.

The “good wine,” that is, good rules, refers to the Law. This is what we read: “You are to love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But the Good News is a better and stronger wine. “My command to you is, love your enemies; pray for those who oppress you.”

You will shine with wondrous light, city of God; all the ends of the earth will see your light and worship the Master. The Nations will come to you from far off; and they will come with gifts to worship the Master.

They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south; and they will come with gifts to worship the Master.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you made us a new creation through your Son, who shared our nature and became one of us, may we please become more like him with his help, as he is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

