



Daily Advent Devotional

Following the Scriptures of the Jesse Tree

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There are a number of Jesse Tree Devotionals out there for families, but I wanted one specifically for women, Catholic women. I wanted a devotional that would cause us to stop, and ponder deep within our hearts the scriptures of the Advent season. This devotional follows along the common scriptures used in the Jesse Tree readings.

Our life is made up of repeated moments and this repetition presses deep into our hearts and minds, the memories solidified. I know the benefit of repeated exposure to the same Scriptures. We are called to hide the Word of God in our heart to keep us from sin. What better way than to hear the same Word, twice a day—once with our family and once just a quiet whispering between a God and His girl.

*Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may
not sin against thee.*

Psalm 119:11

Read these daily meditations in the morning, before you read the family Jesse Tree meditations or read it at night before bed, letting the Word soak deep into your mind as you drift off to sleep. Not only are we called to hide the Word, we are also called to meditate upon the Word, day and night.

*Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the
counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of
sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence: But his
will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he
shall meditate day and night.*

Psalm 1:1-2

I pray these meditations, often short, will slow you down, calm you down and bring you into the presence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. If our first father Adam had not transgressed, God the Father would not be sending His only Son. Without the sin of man, we would not be preparing for the birth of the God Man. Those thoughts can make us slow down real fast...talk of sin and death in the midst of sparkly. Mention of gluttony amid glittery, and you can lose a room of people fast.

But that's the reality of the birth of Christ and Advent is a time to prepare, a mini Lent if you will.

So get ready...He's coming...

December 1

Creation
Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-4

We were created, like all of God's creation, to generate and with purpose—but that does not necessarily mean we were meant 'to do more.'

Instead of doing more, more, more...what if we stepped back...took a deep breath...and decided this Advent instead of doing more—we would just *be*...more

Please, do think 'being more' means being the woman with the most elaborate gingerbread house...made from complete scratch no less! Or the frantic woman searching for the 'perfect' outfit so we can be the best dressed at each and every party we attend this season. Do not fall into the trap of thinking to *be* more we must spend more: time, money, energy...

Let's *be* in the present moment more. That's where we will find Him, that's where we will *be* with Him; you know, the baby-born King.

Let's *be* more aware of God's ever present presence—for that's the true gift...**His presence.** That's why He came down, to live and move and

breathe among us. That's why He died, so we could be with Him in heaven and He could be with us every hour of every day, present on every altar in the world. (Stop in and say "Hi" He would love the company.)

Let's be overwhelmed at the thought of a baby King, coming to bless us with an abundance of His unconditional love to live this earthly life...for the heavenly yet to come.

We do not need more lights, glitter, bows, or garland. **We need more Jesus.**

We do not need more shopping time. **We need more adoration time.**

We do not need more presents. **We need more time in His presence.**

Each and every time we pass something sparkly and shiny today, let's remember God created us to shine! Let's thank God for His light, in us, making us exactly who and how He created us to *be*.

December 2

Adam and Eve
Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-24

As we begin to practice the state of ‘being’ in God, consider this, we are...because God breathed life into us. Our very existence depended on His creative breath. And then, God put us where He wanted us:

house full of noisy kids—**right where He wants us**
stay at home mom with endless laundry, stacks of dishes and a clogged toilet—**right where He wants**

us

single woman still waiting for Mr. Right?—**right where God wants us**

a mom who works outside the home but would love to be able to be a stay at home mom—**right where God wants us**

a cashier dealing with grumpy people all day long—**right where God wants us**

married to an imperfect man, raising imperfect children—**right where God wants us**

Adam and Eve were right where God wanted them, but they started thinking the grass may be greener on the other side of the fence, huh?

When a mom starts pining for life in the cloister,
she's looking over the fence.

When a wife starts admiring and placing another
man's virtues above her own husband's, she's
looking over the fence.

When we start obsessively wishing for what we do
not have, we are looking over the fence.

There is nothing wrong with wanting more, as long
as it will bring us in closer friendship with God, not
closer friendship with life here and now—that's too
easy. And we know better. Eve knew better.

Do you know, Eve had infused knowledge. She
knew a snake should not be talking to her and what
did she do...she listened. We know when the little
voice in our head has crossed the line, and what do
we do...we listen.

When we get a little gut check, a little nudge in our
soul that something is too much this Advent—too
much money, too much time away, too much
distraction, too much food...it probably is. We
need to listen to that little nudge instead of the other
one.

We know: snakes don't talk, some deals are too
good to be true and come January, there will be a

reckoning of some sort based on how we lived in
December.

**Let's choose paradise, even if it looks like a
common manger in the middle of the night.**

December 3

Fall of Man
Genesis 3:1-7, 23-24

And then there is Adam and Eve and the fall and we proclaim with the saints...Thank you 'O happy fault of Adam.' Were it not for Adam and Eve, we would not know Jesus true God and Man. Original sin came into the world through Eve's 'yes' and now the Savior of the world comes in through Mary's 'yes.'

Lord, help us to say 'Yes' *only* after we have taken a minute (at least) to think about our answer.

Eve said 'Yes' to the forbidden fruit out of pride. Is that our reason? Mary said 'Yes' to God out of humility. Or is that our reason?

There is a BIG difference in a 'Yes' based on what others will think of us or a 'Yes' because we want to follow God's divine plan for our life.

Eve made her own plan. Mary obeyed God's plan. So we need to take a minute and ask ourselves, "Will my 'Yes' bring me in closer friendship with God?" "Am I doing this to serve God or myself?"

How often this time of year will our plans change? From something as small as the parking spot we had our eye on being taken to something as unexpected as a last minute tummy bug, or an over cooked turkey. **Mary's plans changed and she said, "Let it be done unto me." Our plans change and we grumble, "Are you kidding me! Why me?"**

It says in the Scriptures, the snake tempted Eve by telling her her eyes would be opened and she would know the difference between good and evil. Eve's eyes were opened *after* she ate of the tempting fruit.

Lord, help us to live this Advent with the eyes of our heart opened *before* we fall. Help us see things for what they really are and use a view of eternity as our filter.

Let's not over spend, over eat, overdo—and fall into the lie that more is better. Eve knew snakes didn't talk and we know 'over doing it' does not bring us lasting joy.

Don't miss God's divine presence trying to fill a void with more presents.

Do not forfeit paradise for something that delights the eye and promises more than we already are.

Eve would tell us, "Been there, done that."

Take time this Advent to prepare our heart for the
Baby Jesus. He's coming and He wants to rest
within us.

December 4

Noah

Genesis 6:5-8, 13-22; 7:17, 23-24; 8:1, 6-22

My thoughts can sure run wild this time of year trying to recreate the picture perfect scenes that fill my Pinterest boards, um...head. I want the outside of my home to look all dreamy Christmasy and the inside to smell all Christmasy and then I will find favor as having a lovely Christmas home, right?.

Noah was a righteous, blameless man who walked with God and he found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Genesis 6:9

Noah based his life on the commands of God, not on the Norman Rockwell ideal of the perfect Christmas. He did not base his life on recreating the Christmas scene Mrs. Noah had recently pinned. He did not base his life on how many kilowatts of electricity his Christmas lawn display could pull. And he certainly did not base his life on sleeping in a tent outside a store to get the ‘best deal’ of the season.

Noah lived in a wooden boat he built in his 500's; not a 'Winter Wonderland'. He lived with his wife, three sons and their wives, and a bunch of animals paired by twos, and I'm pretty sure he was up to his eyeballs in something other than potpourri and glitter. And the Scriptures tell us his little home on earth, "...rose higher above the earth."

I do not know about you, but I would love to feel like I was rising higher instead of carrying around this sinking feeling.

There are many things that can make us feel like we are drowning: debt, comparison, stress, fatigue. Not only do we live over our head, we may feel like we are running around like a chicken with our head cut off.

Let's keep above all that this year. Let's wait for the Lord like Noah. Noah waited until he had a clear sign from God that it was time. Maybe our sign comes from our husband telling us the checkbook can't stretch any farther. Maybe our sign comes from the cranky toddler begging us to sit down and read a story. Maybe our sign comes from the pounding headache and clenched heart; physical signs telling us to sloooowwww doooowwnnnnn.

Did you catch mention of the first thing Noah did after the rain passed and the waters receded? He

built an altar to God and offered a sacrifice that the Lord found as a “pleasing aroma.”

I want to be a pleasing aroma this Advent and Christmas, how about you?

December 5

Abraham
Genesis 12:1-3

If we stop and think about it...everything we try to do and accomplish this time of year is to bless someone. To make our ordinary home extra homey, to make an ordinary gift, extra special and to make all that we do and say intentional. We are trying to do more and be better. And that's a problem—we *are trying*.

What would this Advent look like if we just allowed God to make us the blessing He wants us to be?

If we begin to let things go and become restful instead of rushed...calm rather than chaotic. Would that restful calm produce more grins and maybe even giggles instead of grimaces and groans?

Maybe He does not want us to bless others with a frantic cookie baking blitz. Maybe He wants us to share a cup of something hot spur of the moment with a lonely neighbor. Maybe He wants us to call the new momma as we head to the store to see if she needs a little pick me up sweet treat, or a box of diapers.

And maybe God would prefer the spread of Christmas cheer to begin in our own home and not saved for only those outside our homes.

If we stop and are truly present to our family and friends...**I mean “look ‘em in the eye” present...**wouldn't that be the best present we could give them?

God made Abraham a great blessing to all nations. Not because Abraham did anything really spectacular...or did he?

Do you think obedience can be spectacular? Maybe spectacular is not the right word. How about “Heroic?” I think of heroic in term of deeds and then the twists and turns of my mind leads to a natural synonym—spectacular. So heroic deeds or spectacular deeds...

How about welcoming a baby at the age of 100 like Abraham? That seems pretty spectacular...spectacularly heroic I would say. How about welcoming a baby in this day and age...spectacularly heroic? You betcha! How about welcoming a baby with extra special needs...or welcoming a child with no place to call home--yet...spectacularly heroic? Check and double check!

How about living an active, vibrant Catholic faith...spectacularly heroic? How about living an active, vibrant, *charitable* Catholic life on aisle seven in WalMart the week before Christmas...spectacularly heroic? You know it!

I know we strive for a humble life, imitating Blessed Mother Mary but what a day changer if we woke up tomorrow morning and said, “**I am a spectacularly heroic child of God!**” We would feel like we could do anything! That would make us extra attentive to God, just waiting for the chance to be used by Him as a blessing to someone else? To be someone’s “Super Hero.”

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

This Advent, let’s live spectacularly heroic lives by listening for God *and then doing what He says.*

Get ready. He’s coming!

December 6

Isaac
Genesis 22:1-14

The story of Abraham and Isaac introduces us to Jehovah Jireh, ‘God Will Provide.’ After the angel stops Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac, they find a ram caught in the bushes. ”God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son,” Abraham had told Isaac earlier.

Stressed about money?—**God Will provide.**
Worried about past family tensions erupting around the dinner table?—**God Will provide.**

Worried about hateful words tucked in between ‘We give Thee thanks’ and ‘Pass the potatoes.’—**God Will provide.**

When God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac—the son of his old age—Abraham gets up early and travels three days. Abraham’s first act is obedience, his second...patience...three days worth at least.

This time of year just drains it all right out of us—all our patience, obedience and self-discipline? Getting it all done and getting enough rest battle like the Third World War as we lay our heads on

the pillow each night. Waiting for the paycheck to be deposited, the UPS man to come to a rumbling halt in front of our house, and the lone stock-man at the overcrowded store looking for the hidden reserves behind the door marked ‘Employees Only.’

The turkey’s half done—the stuffing overdone, the dishes undone...Stick a fork in me...we are done!

Look for Him...Jehovah-Jireh, “The Lord will provide”.

The Lord Will Provide. He is there. He really is, just waiting for us to let Him provide for us.

Now, the Lord’s provisions may look a little different than we expect...

We may not win the lottery and be able to financial provide for all our family and friends...but if we woke up this morning, we can help them out spiritually by our prayers and sacrifices.

God Will Provide.

That lone stock-man may not emerge from the back room carrying the last toaster oven on sale...but we have bread in our pantry waiting to go into the non-existent toaster oven.

God Will Provide.

We may wish for a bigger Christmas tree, more sparkle to our lights, newer ornaments and prettier stockings...but we have a roof over our head, a floor under our feet and electricity running through our walls. Oh yea, and we have walls.

God Will provide.

If we don't see it, it might be because we don't need it...yet.

Provide—from the Latin providere “look ahead, prepare, supply,” from pro- “ahead” + videre “to see”.

Provide—to see ahead

God sees ahead of our present circumstances and knows exactly what we need, and when we need it.

God Will Provide...

Tell Him...”Here I am.”

And then wait for Him.

December 7

Jacob
Genesis 25:19-34; 28:10-15

God met Jacob when he was on the run; his head resting on a stone. Jacob was not resting on a soft flannel sheet or a plush down comforter; he was resting on a rock with stars for a blanket. Jacob and God met in a dream that night—maybe that was the only time God could get through to Jacob. And when he wakes up, Jacob proclaims, *“Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.”*

I wonder how often we are in the same place with God and we miss Him. ‘If He were a snake He would’ve bit me’ miss Him.

How about in the check-out line 20 deep – 3 registers open?
How about listening to our extended family’s quaint quirks over a meal?
How about watching our children fight over the last candy cane, last Christmas tree ornament to be hung, last sugar cookie, last red cup, last white plate...
What about our husband on the roof trying to put up decorations or our neighbor’s Christmas light display that I fear may attract small planes.

What about our chaotic, frantic, and just plain worn
out self.

**If God can meet Jacob with his head on a rock –
He can meet us with ours against a brick wall.**

All those situations above – God is right there.
Right smack dab in the middle because we are there
and God lives in us and

*...greater is He that is in me than he that is in the
world.*

1 John 4:4

We need to practice seeing God where we are.
Practice makes perfect right? And if we start
practicing; if we make the choice to see God...to
find God, in every situation, in every place, in
everyone..I bet the more we do it, the easier it will
become.

December 8

Joseph
Genesis 37:23-28, 45:3-15

Remember how we read about God placing Adam and Eve in paradise—well...He also placed Joseph in a pit.

And if Joseph had not been placed in an empty pit—with no water in it even the scriptures states – he would not have eventually been set over the King's affairs.

And if he were not over the King's affairs, he would not have been able to store up the provisions to save his father and brothers.

And if Adam and Eve would not have sinned we would not have needed Jesus our Savior.

And if we did not need Jesus our Savior, we would have no need of Mary – His Mother.

This is starting to sound like a mouse with a cookie or a moose with a muffin...

See how awesome God is!

All things work together for good!

Romans 8:28

Today we celebrate the Immaculate Conception honoring Blessed Mother Mary's ever sinless life—from the moment of her conception. Why? Because...

The pride of sin demanded the beauty of humility.

And sometimes humility is as simple as accepting our present circumstance because we know, **'God's got this.'** Notice, I did not say, "as easy as" because sometimes the simplest things may be the hardest.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

And we might be in an empty pit, without even any water—tossed in there by those closest to us, but our God will pull us out. And He will not sell us off for a bounty—that price has already been paid by a King Who shed His own blood.

Now Joseph of the Old Testament had some pretty hard knocks: from favored son to slave, from slave to prisoner, from befriending fellow prisoners to being forgotten by those fellow prisoners...but he accepted it all as his present circumstances.

Feel like you're in a pit right now? God's got this...**God's got you.**

Just been sold out by those closest to you? God's got this...**God's got you.**

Forgotten, abandoned, lonely and trapped in a mental or physical prison? God's got this...**God's got you.**

Not only does God 'got you'...He wants you.

You want God? He wants you more!

You love God? He loves you more!

December 9

Moses
Ex 2:1 -10

Isn't this a familiar story?.. I mean – the actual story but I also mean the idea – the idea of a humble hidden birth of one little boy who grows to be the liberator of his people. We have Moses – born lowly, raised princely and freed the Israelites. We have Jesus—born lowly, raised humbly and freed the whole human race.

“Let my people go!” booms Moses.
“Get thee behind me Satan,” commands Jesus.

16 days until the joyous event—the birth of our King! How are you feeling? Joyful or miserable, satisfied or sad, contented or condemned?

Who, or what, do we need to stand toe to toe with and boom, “Let me go!”

Is it that streak of perfectionism that runs wide and deep? The one that paralyzes us before we even begin or makes us stop the first time we step back and ‘it’ does not look like we thought ‘it’ would?

We need to break free from that little voice in our head that whispers, “What if?” You know that voice too? The one that is stronger than any shard of Kryptonite meant to bring Superman to his knees.

Our unique vocation, meant to aid in our salvation, in light of the whispered doubts, becomes our greatest weakness.

“What if I’m not a good wife, mother, friend, Catholic, woman, human being, sister, cook, cleaner, homeschooler, Bible reader, Scripture memorizer, Christmas shopper, party guest, grocery shopper, daughter in law, exerciser, organizer, budgeter, driver, singer, pray-er, blogger, thinker, neighbor...”did that list about cover it all?

We need a battle cry my friend and if it worked for Moses, it’s good enough for us. **LET ME GO!”**

...say it...whisper it...sing it...write it...shout it...proclaim it and believe it.

Who or what do we need to command,
“Get thee behind me!”

The little green monster that appears every time we see ‘her?’ You know ‘her.’ The woman who seems to have it all...and it’s all together! Her car is clean, her hair neatly styled, her clothes match, her kids smile, her husband cooks, her parents adore her

and her neighbors praise her. In her presence all we can do is hope we put on deodorant, pray we brushed our teeth and wish we could remember the last time we shaved your legs and washed our hair on the same day because lately it's been one or the other baby!...and we envy her...but we don't know her.

When she crawls into bed at night, is she worried or scared...drunk as a skunk or high as a kite? Does she fall asleep crying because she screamed at her kids, snapped at her husband and gossiped at the book club meeting just to fit in? For all we know, she may envy the fact that our old beater of a car is paid for, our hair is naturally curly (or straight), we rock a soccer mom tee-shirt, our kids are nice to each other (in public at least), our husband *wants* to come home every night after work, our parents come in the front door and help with school or laundry or dinner, or we live in the country with no neighbors.

“Get thee behind me Satan...life is not a competition!”

Let's look up girls—follow the light to the King of Kings. Do not let an earthly ruler, the nagging of Satan and the deathly trap of competition keep us from adoring the baby King.

December 10

Samuel
1 Samuel 3:1-18

I wonder, how many times do we mistake God's voice for something else? How many times do we hear our name and think it's someone else—when really it's God...

“Momma, momma”—“Not now I'm on the phone.”
“Honey,”—“Not now, I'm tired.”
“Excuse me,”—“Not now I'm busy.”

And then, when we realize Who is speaking to us—sometimes are we afraid to speak the truth. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had spoken to him.

The truth can be hard to get out sometimes. Samuel had to tell Eli his house was ‘goin’ down’. († 1 Samuel 3:11-14)

We may be called to tell someone why we don't use contraception. We may be called to tell someone missing Sunday Mass is a mortal sin. And I don't know about you, but sometimes when called upon, I whisper, “Really God? Now? Here? This? Me?”

How many times has our fear stopped us? We are afraid something will be too hard, take too much

time, involve too much of a sacrifice, make us look like some crazy Catholic fanatic.

And in those times when we do listen, when we do recognize the voice of God, or see the hand of God in pain, suffering, tears and trials; do we respond like Eli, **“And he said, “It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him.”** Or do we moan and wail, mentally rending our clothes Old Testament style and spiritually pouring ashes on our head.

God came down as man to give us life eternal...but eternal life comes with a price.

Jesus paid that price with His blood, poured out to open the gates of Heaven. We pay with our openness to God’s call and sometimes, that involves sacrifice—paying a price.

Sacrifice hurts sometimes. Sacrifice hurts lots of times. But we can do anything for a time right? We can endure...Oh yes we can! And if we’re faltering, we better get yourself over here on a Tuesday, or any day, but especially a Tuesday where we pray in community a novena to St Martha for each other. We’ll hold you up.

We can endure for time because we want Him for all time...eternity.

December 11

Jesse
1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Bible is full of stories that follow the old adage—"Don't judge a book by its cover," and this story in 1 Samuel 16:1-13, is one more.

God sends Samuel to find and appoint a new king from one of the sons of Jesse. Sitting down to dinner with Jesse's family Samuel looks one of the sons over and thinks, "Surely this is the one."

But God tells him not to look at the son's appearance or the stature of his height

"...because the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

How many times have we made a quick judgment based on the outward appearance without being able to see the heart?

Man is made in the image and likeness of God. Now we all know God does not look like a 20 year old tongue pierced, purple hair cashier. We also know God does not look like a 40 something year old slovenly couch potato or an 80 year old shriveled up, grumpy, old man. So it is the soul of each individual made in the image and likeness of God. And if we cannot get past the pierced tongue, beer gut or grumpiness...then we cannot see God in that person.

In addition to judging a book by its cover, so to speak, Samuel made a pretty hasty decision. I mean really, he thought he was going to sit down to dinner and the first son he sees is going to be “The One?” I know I’ve been guilty of making a snap decision, not necessarily because I truly felt it was the right one...but because it was by far the easiest one; the one right in front of my face.

Tomorrow we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Talk about not judging a book by its cover! Mary appeared to Juan Diego—a poor, Indian, convert. Blessed Mother could have appeared to anyone: a bishop, a priest, a cradle Catholic for goodness sake! But she choose a

simple man, who converted to Catholicism as a grown man...do not judge a book by its cover.

Let's take a minute to look, really look at the person standing right in front of us today. Find the resemblance between them and God their creator.

December 12

David
1 Samuel 17:12-51

When the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, the Scriptures tell us it came upon him ‘mightily.’ And then David became king, right? Wrong. I mean not yet. David did eventually become king, but he was not an overnight sensation, as the saying goes.

So how did David’s life change after this ‘mighty’ anointing? Well, he still tended his family’s sheep...but now he also soothes a crazy King Saul when Saul’s being tormented by an evil spirit. He becomes the King’s armor bearer...and he continues to serve his family—his brothers in particular. He runs provisions to and from his father to his brothers as they battle the Philistines. David remained who he was, doing what he had been doing before...only now he does more.

God has anointed each one of us to be someone grand and it looks like...exactly who we already are.

David stayed with sheep—we may stay with children, or sick parents, or cranky toddlers, or over-bearing husbands, or grumpy bosses. David

soothed a crazy king – we may sooth a crying toddler, a distraught coworker, a senile grandparent. David ran to and from his father to his brothers- we may run to and from the grocery store, the bank, the piano practices, the sporting events, the in-laws.

And we are none the less anointed to be mighty in the service of God.

God may ask more of us, but only because He has given us more. "What? What has He given me?" we may wonder when we are running to and from, when we are soothing and providing.

He has given us the gift of faith.

If we did not have the gift of faith, we would not be able to handle the answer to our "Why?" The question may be painful and the answer hard and we may whine or curl up in the fetal position or both. *But when it comes down to it, we are mighty women of deep faith because that is how He created us and that is how He sustains us...even when mighty looks like tackling a mountain of laundry, a heap of dishes, or a Goliath covered in mud pie surprise.*

December 13

Solomon
1 kings 3:5-14, 16-28

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern you people, that I may discern between good and evil...”

A prayer each one of us could pray daily huh? “But I don’t govern people” we say- sure we do- we govern ourselves and each day, each hour, each minute we are called to discern good from evil – in ourselves and in others.

One of the ways we discern whether a situation is good or evil is to look for the fruit it bears or will bear.

Ignoring our husband...rotten fruit
Yelling at our kids...rotten fruit
Shoddy work...rotten fruit
Backbiting a friend...rotten fruit

If what we are doing is not bringing us in closer friendship with God the Father—we need to leave it, change it, or stop it...but do not keep doing it if we want to spend eternal life in heaven.

To be a little more specific on the fruit; are we
producing:
love
joy
peace
patience
kindness
goodness
faithfulness
gentleness
self-control

And good fruit producing activities do not always
look like spiritual activities, not in the ‘on your
knees, eyes closed, hands folded in prayer’ spiritual.
But that does not mean it does not produce good
fruit.

A good fruit producing activity might look like a
group of girlfriends laughing over chips and salsa.
Or some one-on-one time with our husband, not
talking about Christmas gifts and budgets and in-
laws and mass schedules and where the presents are
hidden, but “How are you? What’s going on in
your life?”

A good fruit producing activity may be getting to
bed before midnight, warming up a frozen pizza for
dinner or getting in our pajamas before 7 pm all in
the name of making life just a bit easier for one day.
Or living the spirit of Advent without getting hung

up on the letter. Yes Advent is a time of preparation, a “mini-Lent;” but it is also a time of joyful expectation...the Savior is coming! If listening to some Christmas music gets our heart in the right place and a smile on our face, that sounds like good fruit. We are preparing for a baby after all.

But sometimes, a good we desire, because we see the fruit it bears in someone else’s life, would not be a good for us. Let’s ask God for help in discerning what is a good or evil for us and not worry about if it is a good or evil in someone else’s life.

December 14

Joseph
Mathew 1:18-25

Two qualities that stood out as St. Matthew described Joseph as a just man; he was unwilling to put Mary to shame and he was going to resolve his “problem” quietly.

Here St. Joseph had an unwed pregnant woman as his betrothed – a problem that could garner lots of questions and “What am I going to do?” And “Can you believe she would do this to me!?” The whole town would have rallied behind Joseph in condemning Mary—yet he was going to put her away quietly. No legal proceedings, no talk show fodder, no Facebook “he-said...she-said,” no public shaming to make himself look good or at least earn sympathy as a man done wrong by his “innocent bride to be.”

No, good St Joseph was going to take care of his own business...quietly.

Quietly.

I wonder what our day to day would like if we worked things out quietly? Would we be able to, I don't know, listen for the answer from God? Dr

Phil, the men at the bar, and Joseph's momma did not tell Joseph what to do about Mary...an angel of the Lord did.

Not only was Joseph able to keep quiet and listen for God, he also failed to commit the sin of detraction. How often is a "vent" really a chance to detract? We may feel better after we "get it off our chest," but what we've really done is earned ourselves a spot in the confessional.

Was it worth it?
Can we take it back?

What if we quietly prayed about our "problem" instead of playing it out on social media or the phone?

This does not mean we cannot ever discuss a difficulty, complication, disagreement, dilemma, or big 'ol chocolate mess, as my dental hygienist calls it. But let's vow not to discuss in the heat of the moment when our emotions have over powered our rational thinking.

This Advent, let's strive for some silence.

Let's go to prayer instead of the phone...God's Book instead of Facebook...listening instead of talking.

December 15

Our Lady

Genesis 3:15, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38

I wonder, if the Angel Gabriel were to come down
and greet us—would we be proclaimed full of
grace...or full of something else?

So what does 'Full of grace' look like? Let's take a
quick look at the Virtues of Mary for some insight:

Humility "God loves humility so much, that
whenever he sees it, he immediately goes there."
—St Francis de Sales

Love for God "The duties of an active life did not
prevent her from loving, and love did not prevent
her from performing her duties."
—St Peter Damian

Love for Neighbor "...the person who loves God
loves all that God loves."
—St Thomas

Faith "Mary was blessed more by receiving the
faith of Christ than by conceiving the flesh of
Christ."
—St Augustine

Hope “She therefore resigned herself to the care of God in the fullest confidence that he would guard her innocence and reputation.”
– Cornelius à Lapidè

Chastity “Mary would never have found so much grace if she had not been moderate in her meals, for grace and gluttony do not go together.”
–St Bonaventure

Poverty “When we have to suffer from poverty, let us console ourselves with the thought that Jesus and his mother were also poor like ourselves.”
–Saint Bonaventure

Obedience “She was like a wheel which was easily turned by every inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Her only object in the world was to keep her eyes constantly fixed on God, to learn his will, and then to perform it.”
–St Bernardine

Patience “...we can be martyrs without the executioner’s sword, by merely preserving patience.”
–St Gregory

Spirit of Prayer “solitude and silence force the soul to leave the thought of earth behind and to meditate on heavenly things.”
–St Bernard

Let's spend some time each day reading God's precious Word. If we have time to Tweet, Like, Comment or even read a cereal box, we have time to read the Word of God. And the more we saturate ourselves in God's precious Word, the better chance we have of being able to answer like Mary, "*Let it be done unto me according to Your Word.*"

December 16

John the Baptist
Mark 1:1-8

St Mark is known to be the most descriptive writer of the four Evangelists and he shows this in the very first chapter of his Gospel.

What a visual he gives us for John the Baptist: clothed with camel's hair, a leather belt around his waist, locusts and honey for nourishment. What does this description of John have to do with Jesus? I think it sets the scene for our Lord's public arrival.

We know Jesus is a King—the King of Kings! We know He is the Savior—God Himself! But look who was chosen to baptize Him—a camel hair wearin', bug eatin', wild lookin' man. Jesus did not come to save only the posh, polished and well manicured. He came for the real day to day people too. Even those of us with wild hair and questionable fashion sense.

He came for us.
Jesus Christ came for us.

**If we are waiting for Jesus in our perfect...we've
already missed Him.**

He is God...born in a manger. He is God...obedient
to his earthly, carpenter, foster father. He is
God...baptized by a man who lived off of
grasshoppers and honey.

He is our God—ready, willing and waiting to meet
us right where we are:

stinky morning breath? Can't be any worse than
grasshopper breath.

Worn out clothes? St John the Baptist wore camel
hair.

St John tells us he was not even worthy to undue
Jesus' sandal strap—yet he was chosen by God
Himself...to baptize God Himself.

Let's go to Him.
He's waiting.

December 17

Christ as Sapientia (Wisdom)
Isaiah 11:2-3, 28:29

Today begins the O Antiphons. They are called the O Antiphons because they all begin with the letter word 'O': they address Jesus by one of His Old Testament titles. They are fervent prayers asking our Lord to come to us.

An interesting side note mentioned; taking the first letter of each title of Jesus starting with the last and you spell, EROCRAS or 'ero cras' which means, "Tomorrow I come."

The O Antiphons begin on the 17th of December, seven days before the Vigil of Christmas.

The song 'O Come O Come Emmanuel' takes its lyrics from the O Antiphons.

After the Antiphon is recited, pray the **Magnificat**:

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the humility of His handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His Name. And His Mercy is from generation unto generations upon them that fear Him.

He hath shewed might in His arm, He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel, His servant, being mindful of His mercy. As He spoke to our Fathers, Abraham and His seed forever.

Fr. John Hardon writes that “wisdom is the first and highest gifts of the Holy Spirit. It makes the soul responsive to God in the contemplation of divine things. Where faith is a simple knowledge of the articles of Christian belief, wisdom goes on to a certain divine penetration of the truths themselves.

Built into wisdom is the element of love, which inspires contemplative reflection on these divine mysteries, rejoices dwelling on them, and directs the mind to judge all things according to their principles.”

If we had the mind to judge all things according to the principles of love and divine mystery; that would make for a pretty different day wouldn't it?

Jesus, I pray for the grace of Your wisdom. I pray for the overwhelming desire to dwell on You, to be penetrated by You and to see You in others. If I could do this one thing, I would surely become a saint of great love for You and for those who are Yours.

December 18

Christ as Adonai (Lord of Israel)
Isaiah 11:4-5, 33:22

The O Antiphons are prayed before the Magnificat.
“My soul doth magnify the greatness of the Lord.”

**That one verse of the Magnificat is like opening a
bottle of pure joy!**

But sometimes is this what we sound like, “My soul
doth scrutinize the purchases of my neighbor, the
Catholicity of my fellow parishioners or the festive
sugar intake of my sister in law’s children as they
scream through the house?”

Or, “My soul doth magnify my Facebook Likes,
Twitter followers and Email Subscriptions?”

How about, “My soul doth magnify my big house,
shiny car and 4G phone.”

Lord, help us practice merciful charity—sometimes
heroically, and each and every time, we will offer a
word of thanksgiving to God the Father for His
infinite mercy bestowed upon us.

Lord, help us strive for humility in all things—and
each and every time we will offer a word of

thanksgiving to God the Son for coming and dying
for us.

Lord, help us strive to be a source of encouragement
(or at least not a source of discouragement) to all
those we meet, especially those in our own home—
and each and every time we will offer a word of
thanksgiving to God the Holy Spirit for His
wonderful counsel.

December 19

Christ as Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)
Isaiah 11:1, 10, Micah 5:11, Romans 15:8-13,
Revelations 5:1-5

I want to be filled this Advent...filled to overflowing. Not with fruitcake, but with joy! I want to believe in the peace of Christ that passes all understanding, not cheesy advertising tempting me to buy what I do not need! I want to abound in hope, not debt! I do not want to get sucked into 'Bigger...Better...Faster'

Our Lord's title here, 'Out of the Root' contradicts 'Bigger...Better...Faster.' A life based on 'Bigger...Better...Faster' expects a genealogy starting from the top of the mighty Redwood, not the root. And yet, that's where it all begins isn't it?
The root.

How are our roots?

If we over spend, driving our family deeper into debt just to have the latest fad or buy our children the hottest toy this Christmas...would that be an indication of a shallow root system?

If we tap our foot in line behind the old, slow or just plain bothersome-to-us person in the check out

line...would that be an indication of a dry root system?

If we smile at the handsome Marine collecting Toys for Tots but scowl at our husband when he walks into the room...would that be an indication of a rotten root system? (come on now!)

If we only did good to those who did good to us...would that be an indication of an immature and stunted root system?

Out of the Root of Jesse comes the baby King.
From humble beginnings to magnificent eternity.
From one man's son comes the Son to save all men.

Weep not, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David...He's coming!

Are we ready?

December 20

Christ as Clavis David (Key of David)
Isaiah 22:22, Isaiah 9:6

Five more days; are we feeling the push to get it all done? Not only to get it all done, but to get it all done perfectly Pin-worthy? Or have we just thrown up our hands, said “It is what it is. I can’t do anymore. I have nothing left to give.”

This time of year, we may call people lots of names:
Jerk...who took our parking spot at the mall
Grump...behind the cash register
nosy...kids looking high and low for gifts
Stressful...family
Clueless...husband
Grinch...boss

STOP! When those names are on the tip of our tongue ready to fall out, spew out or only muttered through clenched teeth—Replace them with the names of Christ:

Wonderful
Counselor
Mighty

Father of the World to Come
Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6

No, we do not call the hot head in the mall parking lot “Father of the World to Come.” We call *on* Jesus, “Father of the World to Come.”

Stressful family situations, married tension, demanding bosses, and over eager kids, these can be a distraction to God. The more time we spend thinking about, talking about and complaining about everyone on that list, the less time we spend with the Prince of Peace. Let’s not waste our time. Let’s replace out time.

Just saying those holy names, especially slowly and out loud, well, it’s bound to lower anxiety and probably blood pressure.

December 21

Christ as Oriens (Radiant Dawn, Dayspring)
Isaiah 9:2, Malachi 4:1-3

This sure is a season of light huh? LED, flashing, twinkling, blinking, glowing, icicle like. We use terms of light to describe lots of things: “A smile that lights up a room...An attitude that chases away darkness...A vibrant personality...A glowing report.”

Let’s be lit up this Advent and Christmas—and I am not talking about the kind of lit up from my brother in law’s Apple Pie Moonshine (although it is yummy). No, I’m talking about the light of Christ within us, the Son of Justice to light me up. And that Light of Justice will reveal all.

Let it all be revealed! We want to be illuminated. We would rather see it now; it—the sin, bad habits and faults that keep us so far from God. We want to see deep down in the crevices that hide our sin and the dark recesses that conceal our faults and the gray, tangled, cob-webs of vice accumulating in the corners. These can only be seen if we are filled with the light of Christ...or the flames of Purgatory.

I choose the Light of Christ.

But that's a part of any preparation isn't it?

Bringing everything into the light to get a good once over. The cleaning and clearing, making room for something better. Getting rid of the unused, the ugly...basically the junk. And so we drag it out and examine it in the light. "Yes, this has to go," we may declare as we look at it from all sides. Or, we may decide it can stay, but we clean it up and use it differently.

Let's take a good look and see what needs to be tossed to the curb and what can stay, but used differently. I'm talking physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Let's take a great big inventory, digging deep, asking ourselves the hard questions, holding ourselves up in the Light. And once the inventory is completed, if there is sin, let's confess it and get it out of there...for good. Let's end the old year and start the new year off as clean and shiny as possible. Figure the less sin and bad habits cluttering our soul, the more room for the Love of Christ.

Jesus already came once in the dark, only to be told there was no room... We do not want to be the one to say it this time.

December 22

Christ as Rex Gentium (King of All Nations)
Isaiah 9:7 Isaiah 2:4

Three more days. Are we ready? Does it seem like Christmas is so close or does it seem like it's still a ways out? How about 80 miles away? 80 miles is the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'us was governor of Syria.

And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Luke 2:1-5

Do we have somewhere—maybe closer than 80 miles or maybe farther—that we need to travel this Christmas?

Do we need to walk down the hall, take a left in the first open door and spend some quiet time with a little one who has been hustled and bustled until their little heart almost broke and their temper did?

How about the distance between grown siblings? Hurt feeling, harsh words and plain old misunderstandings can create a chasm greater than 80 miles wide and 80 miles deep. Is the crevasse filled with sour memories and more time than we know how to make up for? One step...one call...one generic Christmas card could make all the difference in the world.

When we crawl in bed at night, what's the mathematical equation to find the area between us and our husband? Him hanging off the right side plus us hanging off the left equals a span of separation not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. What would happen if we just reached out yonder, across crumpled sheets and through flannel pajamas and touched his arm as we fell asleep? Would that be the first step to help fill that void?

Does God the Father seem so far out there, way past the tiniest of stars we stare up at each night,

wondering where He is and not really caring what the answer may be because we don't feel like he's near us. As the animated character Buzz Light-Year would say, "To infinity and beyond!" Is that where God seems right now? Beyond.

Do we know how much we are wanted and loved by God? God loves us and wants us. He longs, LONGS, to be near us. So much so, He makes Himself available all the time, 24/7, 365, on too many altars to count and way more churches to name and number.

That noisy child following us around, he longs to be near us. That's why he sticks so close. If he were a toddler, he could be unrolling the toilet paper roll. If he were a young boy, he could be hidden in some secret fort out back. If he were a teen, he could be gone...just gone...period. Instead he's around, maybe bugging us, but around none the less.

Those families ties stretched to the breaking point and beyond. There may be hope. And if there is no hope just yet, and in some families there is not, there is prayer. Whether we see them or not, we must pray for them. Fill those miles with prayer and all will be well someday, maybe not until heaven, but all will be well.

The man we share that expanse of bed with, if he does not long for you...ache for him. Yes, ache.

ache

verb (used without object)

1.

to have or suffer a continuous, dull pain: His whole body ached.

2.

to feel great sympathy, pity, or the like: Her heart ached for the starving animals.

3.

to feel eager; yearn; long: She ached to be the champion. He's just aching to get even.

Ache for your man, ache for your marriage. God promises to make all things new and let Him start with you.

The baby Jesus is coming to be the King of all nations and everyone knows a good king restores and unifies...families, marriages, hearts...all things.

December 23

Christ as Emmanuel (God is With Us)
Isaiah 7:14

Are we ready? This whole month has been spent in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the King of Kings, the Savior of the World. And He comes as a baby.

The time of waiting is a time of testing. There is nothing else to do but trust in the living God. There is nothing harder for an imperfect soul like ours to do, than to learn that we ourselves can do nothing and all things are done by God.

The time before birth always seems longer than any other. Maybe God made it seem so long so that we would be forced to wonder about Him—the Father of ourselves and of our children.

We are with God, and we must look at Him with the eyes of faith in those long nights of anticipation.

—Blessed is the Fruit, from an article “How to Have a Baby” which appeared in St Joseph Magazine by April Ousler Armstrong

Birth and death are sisters, the strange twins who bridge the verge between eternity and time. The hour of birth draws near and no woman in the world can be completely free of fear. It is not pain or danger that haunts us most. Though we may not have the words to capture it there is in us an awe at the fact that there will be one moment when life and death graze in passing.

—Blessed is the Fruit, from an article “How to Have a Baby” which appeared in St Joseph Magazine by April Ousler Armstrong

Are we ready for the moment in time when eternal life and death meet in the stable?

Jesus came, born as baby in a manger to poor humble parents so we might have life...and have it more abundantly. This time of preparation, has been to prepare us for the new life we live found only in Christ.

God is with us! And that fact alone should produce abundant living.

He has overcome death so we could live full earthly lives and glorious eternal ones.

An abundant life is filled to overflowing with hope. So are we? Living an abundant life? A life filled to the brim and spilling over?

A synonym for hope is faith.

“I hope my husband gets a raise and if he does not, I have faith everything will work out anyway...maybe even better.”

A synonym for hope is belief.

“I hope my situation turns out for the good, but I believe all things work together for the good for those who love God.”

A synonym for hope is endurance.

“I hope my marriage, my children, my job, etc, will turn around and be a source of comfort and joy. Until then, I will endure and love like Christ...because He loved me first.”

God is with us! This is a time of great rejoicing!

December 24

John 1:1-14

The month of waiting is about to be over in a few short hours. We will celebrate the birth of Christ. God made Man to save man. Can you even believe it? Could you even imagine it?

The Creator...becoming like the created...to save the created! That makes no sense does it?

But neither does joy in the midst of sorrow, peace in the midst in trials and comfort in the midst of suffering. But our God does not have to make sense to the world...although He created this world, it does not know Him.

If this world knew Jesus, Christmas would only be beginning tomorrow. After the gifts were opened, the turkey eaten and the trash carried out to the curb...the season of Christmas would just be starting.

Let's celebrate Christmas as a season, not just a day.

The preparations of Advent are past, now is the time for rejoicing and our baby Savior deserves more than one day don't you think? Holy Mother Church

thinks so; traditionally the Church has celebrated the birth of Jesus through at least the Epiphany on January 6. But the season of Epiphany, which begins on the Eve of the Epiphany, is not over until the end of the Octave of Epiphany, which lasts for eight days, so not until the 13th. And the season of Christmas actually runs all the way through to February 2, the Feast of the Purification or Candlemas Day.

The time is at hand; continue to prepare the way of the Lord!