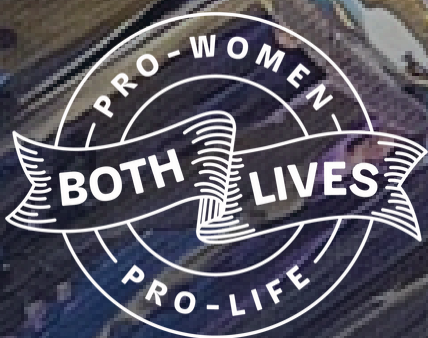


GOD UNBORN

Advent devotions



GOD UNBORN

Advent devotions 2024

Many of you joined with us in March when, with the help of our *God Unborn* devotional resource, we celebrated the Word becoming flesh at His conception.

Now, nine months later we enter Advent, a time of anticipation and preparation for Christmas Day. It's a time to reflect on Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, and the arduous journey which culminates in celebration and joy at the birth of this very special baby.

We'd love you to join us over the five Sundays in December as we pray and thank God for His wonderful gift; the Incarnation and birth of Jesus our Lord and Saviour.



SUNDAY, 1 DECEMBER

Prophet's Candle: Hope

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call Him Immanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

Immanuel; God with us. Jesus' Incarnation and birth had been prophesied centuries before it actually happened. Isaiah was speaking to the people of Israel who had lost their way and had found themselves constantly besieged and under attack by other nations. God's words of prophecy through Isaiah are a reassurance to the people of Israel and to us. With the birth of Jesus 2000 years ago, God joined us in our humanity. In His divinity He continues to bring hope to the world and we rejoice because He is with us still. God gives us signs and wonders to guide us and to strengthen our faith. His presence gives us hope for the future and the perseverance to keep walking with Him, even if all seems lost.

Reflect: Mary knew that Israel had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah for hundreds of years. Can you imagine how she felt when she realised that she was chosen and invited to be the mother of that long-foretold Messiah and the Saviour of her people?



SUNDAY, 8 DECEMBER

Bethlehem Candle (Peace)

Gerard Van Honthorst "The Adoration of the Christ Child" (1619-1621)

“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.”

Micah 5:2-3 (NRSVA)

This prophecy of the coming of the Saviour from the Book of Micah reveals that the Saviour will come through the labour of childbirth. It also reveals that the Saviour’s “origin is from of old”. Jesus has always existed with the Father but His human form began at a particular point in history, in the womb of His mother, Mary. As we continue to move through Advent and prepare for Christmas imagine how the people of Israel felt, waiting for a Saviour, listening to the prophecies, wondering when the Saviour would come and who the Saviour would be. Their hopes of restoration of the lost tribes of Israel, their prayers of deliverance from their oppressors and the unity of their land, all focused on the coming of the Messiah. They waited for the full revelation of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 9:1-7) and the coming of the Prince of Peace who would bring shalom to their land and to their lives.

In 2024, we walk in anticipation during Advent but we can also rejoice because we know the full story. We read the ancient prophecies and interpret God’s signs and wonders, realising that for us the kingdom is both here and not yet. We partake in the building up of the kingdom and spreading the message of the good news – the One who was born in Bethlehem.

Reflect: Bethlehem means “House of Bread”. How fitting that the Bread of Life, Jesus, would be born there, and laid to rest in a manger – a feeding trough. God feeds us and nourishes us for the task of being His light in the world, bringing comfort, joy and peace to those in our homes and communities.

SUNDAY, 15 DECEMBER

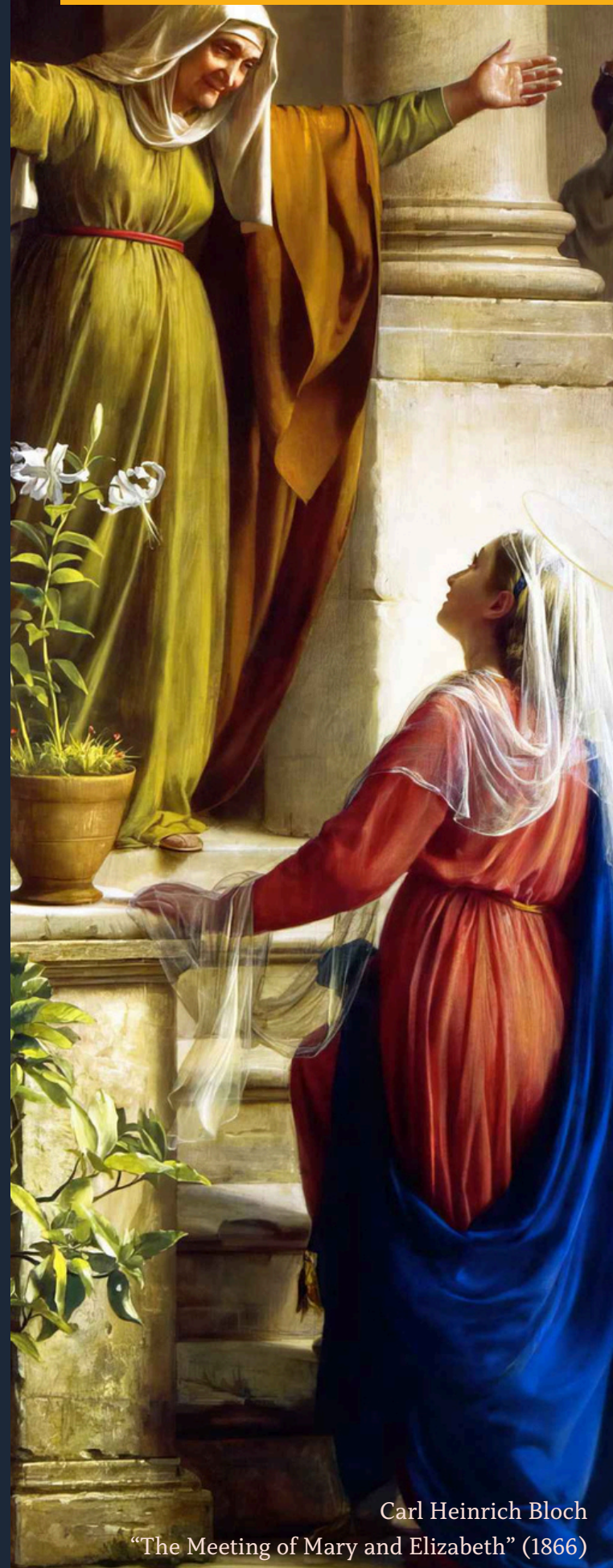
Shepherd's Candle (Joy)

“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”
Luke 1:41-44 (ESV)

Mary's visit to Elizabeth has been captured by many artists throughout the centuries. Two women rejoicing in the promises God is fulfilling through them with their miraculous pregnancies and through the babies in their wombs. Their joy flows from their knowledge of the grace of God physically materialising in their lives and calling them to move forward and bring that grace of God into the world they live in.

Inspired by the generosity of Mary's "Yes", may our daily "Yes" strengthen and embolden us to carry Jesus' presence within us. As His hands and feet on earth, we are called to share His good news with those around us. When we do this, we bring Jesus into the presence of our friends, family, and neighbours, just as Mary carried the unborn Jesus into the presence of Elizabeth and the unborn John the Baptist.

Reflect: How do we feel about the potential for God to perform miracles today in our lives? It is good for us to take time to think about what God fulfils daily in each one of us.



Carl Heinrich Bloch

“The Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth” (1866)

SUNDAY, 22 DECEMBER

Angel's Candle (Love)

***“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.”
Galatians 4:4 (ESV)***



Fra Angelico “Annunciation” (1426, Madrid)

Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully man. Mary didn't lend her womb for a transplanted Jesus. Scripture tells us Mary conceived by the Spirit. Through conception her son was biologically related to her, sharing her DNA and humanity.

In the Garden of Eden, God's creation was complete when He made male and female to bear His image and likeness. From the start, He took pleasure in being in relationship with them. At the point of the Fall, His salvation and redemption plan was declared when the “the seed of the woman” would conquer evil. By including Mary in His salvation plan, God reminds us of the value and dignity of women, and His love and care for them.

Reflect: Dwell on the long, slow, nine months Jesus spent in the womb, waiting, growing, and developing. God could have chosen to send His Son into the world in any way He wanted – as a young boy looking after sheep, as a fully grown man walking out of the desert. Instead, God chose to ask a young woman to be the mother of His Son, to conceive and carry Him in her womb. To give birth to Him, and help Him to grow up in a tumultuous Roman world. Imagine Mary, the mother of the Messiah, feeling Jesus moving and stretching and turning within her womb.

The Creator of all, nurtured inside one of His created.

WEDNESDAY, 25 DECEMBER

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16 (ESV)

Like the Nativity story this verse is so well known that perhaps we don't reflect on it enough. On this day of celebration and wondrous joy – the day when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus - we think of the gift of this baby boy. He left His throne and submitted to all the fragility, vulnerability and dependence of human form. From conception to death He gave His life for us.

Reflect: Think of the joy of Mary's motherly devotion to the child she has carried within her for nine months and has now given birth to. Jesus is the Seed spoken of in Genesis 3:15. Mary was chosen by God the Father to be the mother of God the Son. A divine calling and purpose planned from the beginning. God always knew that His plan of salvation would include human conception, birth and a mother.

God the Father also entrusts His son, Jesus, to Joseph. Think of Joseph – likely the first man to look on the incarnate face of God the Son. Joseph will care for Jesus as his own. God the Father's plan, from all eternity, has been fulfilled today in Bethlehem – a Son has been given to us and He is our Salvation.

Merry Christmas and God bless us all.



SUNDAY, 29 DECEMBER

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”
Matthew 1:20-21 (NRSVA)



Philippe de Champaigne “The Dream of St Joseph” (1642-43)

From the beginning, God planned to send His son, born of a woman and given an earthly father in Joseph the carpenter. God chose a family for His Son, Jesus, to live in.

He did not live in isolation. His parents cared for Him. The angel gives Joseph a task – to legally name Jesus. Joseph knows that this name means “God saves”. From conception Jesus has a name and an identity – the Saviour. Think of Joseph’s awe realising that the Messiah is within Mary’s womb and he will be the one to name Him when He is born. God the Father entrusts His son, Jesus, to Joseph. God tasks Joseph with caring for His Son as if He was his own. Joseph’s naming of Jesus meant he claimed Him as his son on earth. He will teach Him how to walk, talk and create with His hands – passing on his skills as a carpenter. Joseph teaches the Son of God how to pray to God the Father. Joseph’s fatherhood enables the divinity of Jesus to remain hidden, allowing Jesus to grow in wisdom and prepare for His mission. Joseph will bring Jesus to the Father’s house in Jerusalem, to offer sacrifice at Passover many years before Jesus would offer Himself as the sacrifice.

Reflect - Today many Christians take time to meditate on this holy family of Nazareth. Jesus grew up in an obscure little village and lived a seemingly quiet life until His public mission began. For 30 years, God the Son was partaking in everyday family life – chores, labour, worship – all done with His earthly family. As we come to the end of December and look to a New Year perhaps we might think about the glory we give to our Heavenly Father when we do the simple task of daily living.



“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14



God Unborn Lectio Divina resources

A devotional resource for churches, groups or individuals, to help you reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation.



Where to find us:

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