



Advent | Joy

Within our Catholic tradition, important symbols that capture the essence of Advent are the evergreen and the light; both are used to create wreaths. The candles placed within the wreath acknowledge the light of Christ not only in the world, but also in our hearts. One candle is lit each Sunday until all four candles are lit, and sometimes a fifth candle is lit on Christmas. As Christmas draws nearer, each candle brings a little more light into the darkness, the light of Christ burns brighter and stronger as Christ's birth approaches.

At the beginning of our prayer you are invited to light a candle in contemplative anticipation of joy.

Joy & Remembering

Each of the candles represents an aspect of preparation during the season of Advent. Purple is the primary colour associated with Advent. Within the Catholic Church it symbolises **penance, preparation, and sacrifice**. During Advent, we are filled with joy for the near arrival of Jesus on Christmas Day.

The candle of Joy is called the "Shepard's Candle" and is meant to remind us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy that the faithful have reached at the midpoint of advent.

Be a beacon of hope in this turbulent world...from homes that are a light on the hill.

The XXII General Chapter

Scripture

John 1: 19-28

The Testimony of John the Baptist

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

Scripture Reflection

We reflect on John's Gospel during Advent

Pope Francis reminds us that the gospel and our interactions with each other are intended to be joyful and we should give thanks for this joy. How can we give thanks when we feel so wronged? How can we rejoice when we feel we just do not come up to expectation? How can we rejoice when our daily struggle to live and provide makes life barely survivable?

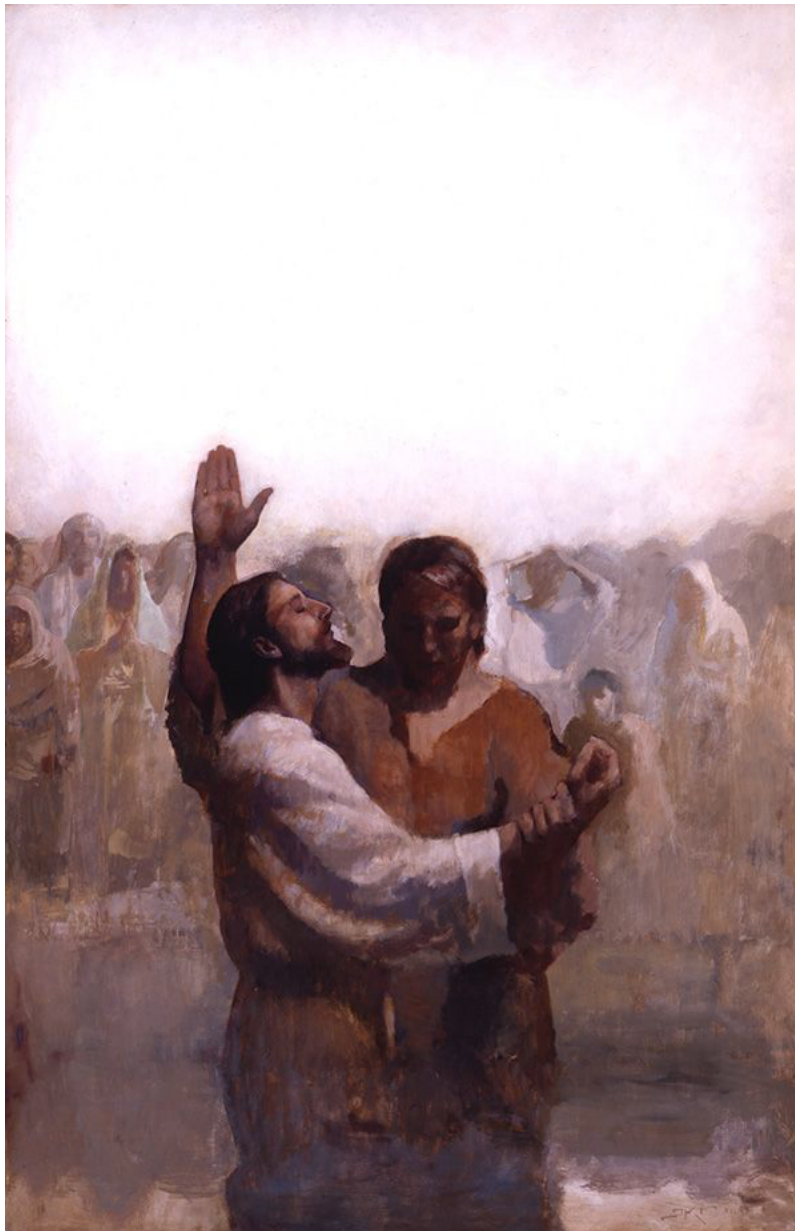
True celebration acknowledges the darkness and accepts its reality: it does not try to deny it but rather says that our story in relationship with God is far bigger. We therefore should ask God to help us answer the practical questions of dealing with the results of misconduct, ours or someone else's. And as a community we can increase our efforts to help each other, and especially the poor and vulnerable, to live more human lives.

Mary, as a sensitive and compassionate disciple, goes "in haste," responding quickly to those who need her. She goes "in haste" to joyfully announce the news of a God who loves, and the sure promise that a reign of justice and faithfulness is at hand. She brings to Elizabeth both her hands for service and her experience of the Spirit.

Water from the Rock n.133

Pray | Imaginative Contemplation

My Beloved by Loretta Pehanich



Jesus being Baptised by John the Baptist
by J. Kirk Richards

Imagine the following:

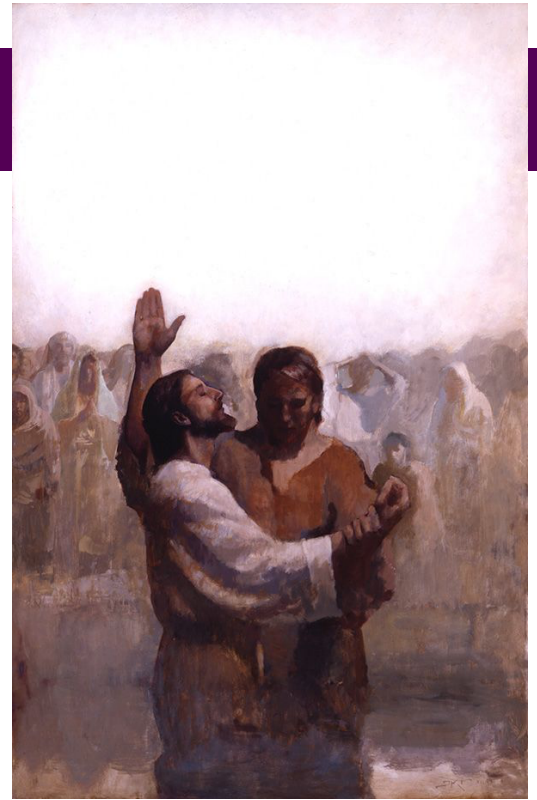
Pray | Imaginative Contemplation

My fingers brush the holy water as I enter the church. I'm here and I linger, imagining the Jordan. Was it shallow or deep, cold or comfortable?

I see John the Baptist and crowds of onlookers. Some have already been baptised; others are making a ruckus with some Pharisees. I try to ignore them, refocusing on Jesus' mother, who is seated on a large rock under a tree. I approach and sit with her. Next to her is her sister, the one who will stand at the foot of the Cross. I follow Mary's gaze and see Jesus approaching for baptism.

Mary looks at Jesus with pure love. I recognize that expression; the same love overwhelms my face when I look at my own children.

I can't hear what Jesus and John are saying, but John seems to question Jesus. John nods with pursed lips, and gently takes hold of his cousin and plunges Jesus under the water.



"Why is Jesus doing this?" I ask Mary. "Because he loves. He is doing this out of love," she says, never taking her eyes off Jesus, and holding her sister's hand tightly. "I wish John's mother were alive to see this. Oh, how we laughed and danced when we were pregnant together! She'd join me in rejoicing."

Jesus stands up in the water and shakes the excess from his long hair and beard. He struggles with soaked clothing to the bank, right where Mary, her sister, and I are seated. I feel cold droplets splash from him onto me.

"You are ready to begin?" Mary asks her son in a maternal tone. "It's time."

I watch as Jesus gazes at his mother. I wonder if she told him to come here today. She touches her chest in quiet encouragement and love.

I notice a slight breeze, which causes me to look up at the most amazing clouds I've ever seen. A stirring in the crowd tells me that some of the people are noticing something too. Some hear a voice. Others think it's wind, rustling. For others, it's an overwhelming theophany (human manifestation of God). He is here. **He is here.**

I hear Mary echo the words coming from the clouds as I stare at a white dove. "You are my beloved son, too, Jesus," she says.

"Yes, mother," Jesus says with reverberating tenderness. Mary adds, "You are ready for the desert."

She reminds me of my own mom, who seemed to have a sixth sense as she parented me and my siblings. I imagine Mary as a woman of deep wisdom, already supported by a community represented by her sister. As I witness this conversation between mother and son, something in their radiance tells me that I am beloved too.

Noisy children pull my eyes back to the river. John continues to baptise; the line is longer than before. I stare as I ponder what I've just heard Mary and the voice from heaven say: *You are beloved. I am pleased with you.* When I turn, Mary is standing, watching Jesus walk toward the desert. People don't seem to notice. Mary's eyes remain on her son as he heads to where he will be tempted.

I have asked for the grace to live my baptismal call.

How will I weather life's adventures as I am directed to the deserts awaiting me this year?