

Impact

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.

In this month of December, it is easy to lose sight of the reason for the season amidst the shopping, activities and seasonal gatherings that fill our lives. Rather than being distracted by these things or totally abandoning the spirit of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, good stewardship of our time and attention might suggest a different approach: focus on the great love of God which we celebrate in the incarnation, and make a commitment to share Christ's light and love throughout this month.

Ironically, we may find our call to be loving, forgiving and compassionate more challenging at this time of the year than at any other. People around us may try our patience and our already-busy pace may be pushed to the limit. It may seem difficult to believe that Jesus was born into our human state, with all of the evidence of just how unloving humans can be! And yet, God does love us! More than we can imagine.

Come, Emmanuel. Wisdom. Day-Spring. Lord of Might. Desire of Nations. Throughout Advent, especially from December 17 until Christmas, we sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, using Biblical titles for the long-awaited Messiah. When we call Jesus "Emmanuel" we are making a statement of deep faith and enduring hope. Jesus is Emmanuel, God who is with us.

God is with us. If God is with us, there is nothing to fear in life or death. If God is with us, we can trust that all will be well, regardless of the difficulties of the present moment. If God is with us, we can mirror God's lavish giving by giving of ourselves and our resources, and know that in doing so, we help others to see that God is with *them*.

In sharing love with the people around us, particularly when it is difficult to do so, we will make the incarnation known. This may just be the best gift we could give now, or at any time of the year!

Impact this month

PRAY.

Consider the simple gift of YOU – who needs your attention? Be it a family member, a friend, a neighbor, or that person in need tugging on your heartstrings, present the gift of YOU.

SERVE.

Who could benefit from your unique gifts? What resources do you have to give? What is your generous response to all the gifts you have been given?

SHARE.

We don't have to search far and wide to find the meaning of the season. This month, cast out the darkness of doubt, poverty, loneliness, and need as you share the light of Christ with others.

The Lord is here. The Lord will come.



*Good news of great joy!
Christ is born.*



The message of Christmas

“The message of Christmas makes us recognize the darkness of a closed world, and thereby no doubt illustrates a reality that we see daily. Yet it also tells us that God does not allow Himself to be shut out. He finds a space, even if it means entering through a stable; there are people who see his light and pass it on. Through the word of the Gospel, the angel also speaks to us, and in the sacred liturgy the light of the redeemer enters our lives. Whether we are shepherds or ‘wise men’ the light and its message calls us to set out, to leave the narrow circle of our desires and interests, to go out to meet the Lord and worship him. We worship him by opening the world to truth, to good, to Christ, to the service of those who are marginalized and in whom he awaits us.”

— Benedict XVI, 2007

We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.

For the shepherds who were in the field, it was just an ordinary night in which they took turns watching for predators, listening for threats to their flock and themselves. That night, like every night, they hoped they would get some rest and that the dawn would find them safe, with all the sheep accounted for. They surely were not expecting messengers of God announcing the birth of the Christ-child. In their wildest dreams they had not imagined the glory of God shining around them. Is it any wonder the angel felt it necessary to tell them to not be afraid?

We go about our ordinary days and nights, our lives often filled with activity with little time to ponder the larger things in life. We have our routines and rarely deviate from them, feeling a kind of security in the repetition. We sometimes forget that Christ is with us, and frankly do not often expect an in-breaking of God's glory and grace. And yet, God's grace abounds. We are surrounded by divine light, if only we have eyes to see it and hearts to perceive it.

We recognize fear of the Lord - awe - as a gift of the Holy Spirit. This fear rightly shakes us when we encounter Christ's presence, when we are filled with the sense that God is with us, greater than our hearts, bigger than any circumstance we face in our lives. When filled with awe, we may sense the presence of the holy messengers of God, the angels, saying, “do not be afraid.” Likewise, we may find ourselves fearful when we face tasks for which we do not feel equipped, life challenges which appear larger than our capacity to handle. Again, hear the angels cry, “do not be afraid.” We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. Let us not be afraid. Let our lives bear witness to the glory of God which surrounds us, the grace in which we stand.