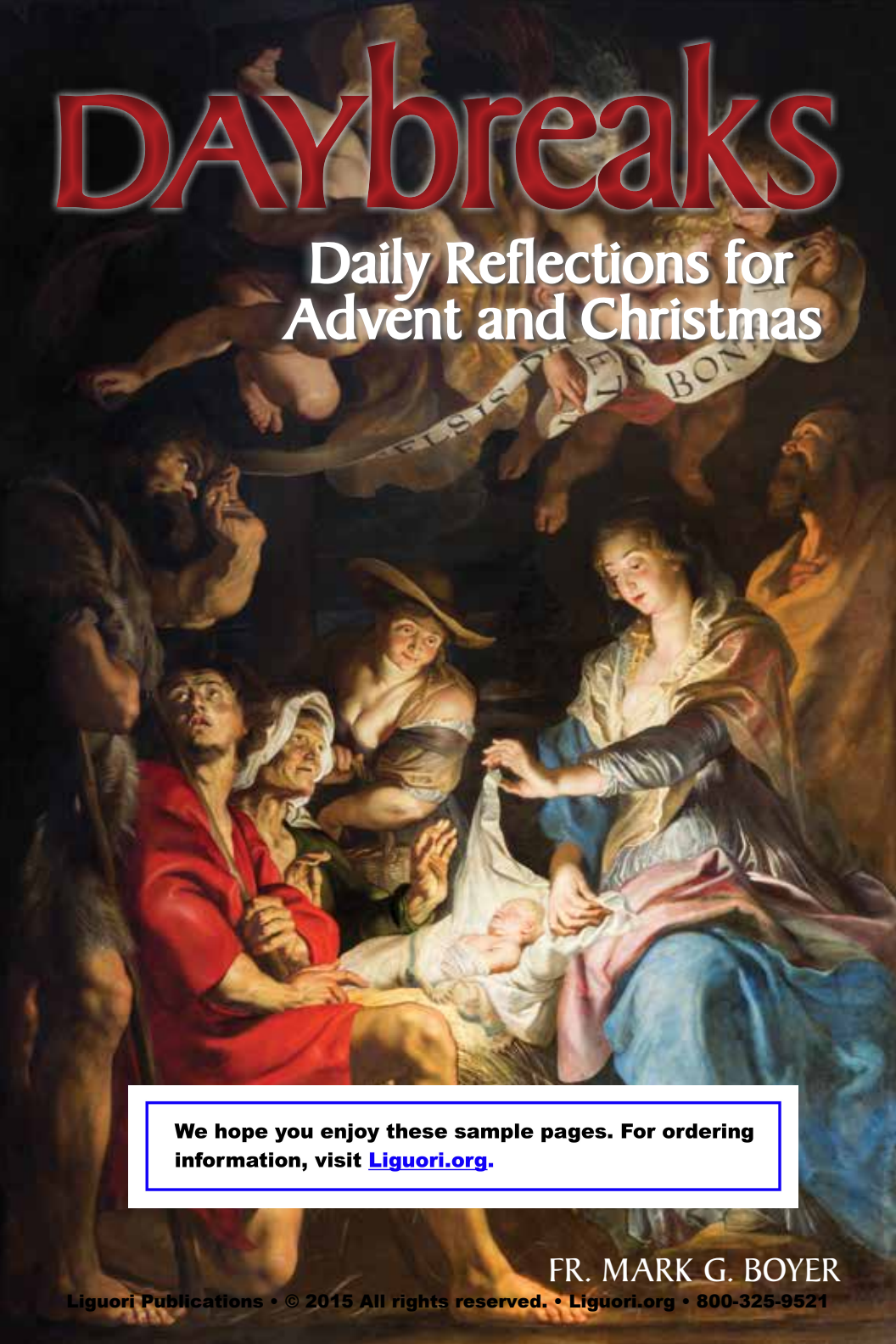




DAYbreaks

Daily Reflections for
Advent and Christmas

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information, visit Liguori.org.

FR. MARK G. BOYER

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Introduction

The theme of this *Daybreaks* is people and things of Advent and Christmas. For the next five weeks, we will be focused on the people and things that fill these thirty-five days of Advent and Christmas. We will journey through Advent, a liturgical season designed to prepare us for Christ's coming in three ways: at the end of time, in word and sacrament now, and the annual commemoration of his Nativity. We will rejoice during Christmas, a liturgical season designed to celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago; to honor his Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary; to remember his Holy Family; and to mark his manifestation to the world.

At the beginning of each week, a prayer will be provided. The prayer is meant to be used before or after reading the reflection for each day that week and attempts to capture the spirit of the week. After praying the prayer for the week, turn to the reflection for the day or pray the prayer after you finish the daily reflection.

Each day begins with a phrase or a title of a person or thing. The title is meant to serve as an image to use throughout the day. You may think about it, ponder it, pay attention to it throughout the day. The phrase or title of the person or thing is meant to serve as a photo for the mind that will aesthetically enrich your spirit and your Advent and Christmas spirituality.

The person or thing emerges from the biblical texts assigned as readings for each day of Advent and Christmas. Where appropriate, a few words or verses have been incorporated into the reflection from Scripture. The Bible texts serve as a nest for the egg you will hatch from the warmth of the prayer and the stirring of your spirit through the reflection.

I hope that your spirituality will be enriched through your use of this booklet. In short, by the end of Advent and Christmas, I hope many “chicks” of spirituality will have hatched.

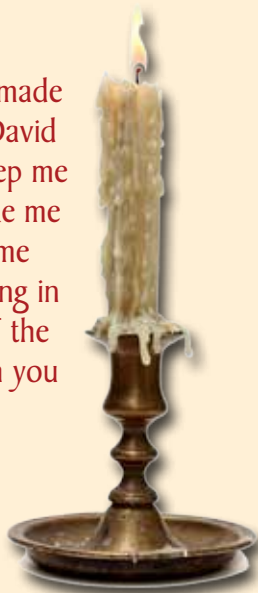


First Sunday of Advent

One Candle

Prayer

Lord God, you fulfill the promise you made to Israel and Judah by raising up for David a just shoot, my Lord Jesus Christ. Keep me blameless in holiness before you. Make me aware of the signs of the times. Help me to be vigilant at all times for the coming in a cloud with power and great glory of the Son of Man, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.



*[M]ay the Lord...strengthen your hearts, to be
blameless in holiness before our God and Father at
the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.*

1 Thessalonians 3:13

Advent begins with a focus on the return of Christ in glory. The earliest books of the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul, have an imminent expectation of Christ's return in them. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, the oldest New Testament book (written around AD 50), exhorts Christians to be blameless before God "at the coming of our Lord Jesus" (3:13). Forty years later (around 90), the author of Luke's Gospel tells his readers to "be vigilant at all times and pray that [they] have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man" (21:36). They will see him "coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (21:27).

This imminent expectation of Jesus' return is represented by lighting the first candle on your Advent wreath, made from a circle of evergreens into which you place either three purple and one rose candle or four white candles. Turn off all electrical lights after igniting the first candle and just sit with your eyes focused on it. Even from a long distance away, the light of the candle can be seen.

After the Lord's Prayer at Mass, the priest declares that "we await the blessed hope, and the coming of Our Savior, Jesus Christ." Today's one candle represents the Church's hope for Christ's coming again in glory and majesty, not an expectation that comes to mind every day of our lives! We are like that single candle, burning brightly in hope and looking forward to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time.

Monday
First Week of Advent
St. Andrew's X

[I]f you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

We no more than get started with Advent and the feast of St. Andrew, Apostle, suddenly interrupts it! Such is the way of the liturgical calendar! However, before we go too far lamenting the derailing of Advent, we ought to consider Paul's words to the Romans in today's Scripture verse. As Paul knows well, before we can confess Jesus as Lord, someone has to be sent to proclaim him.

Matthew's Gospel demonstrates how simple it is to be called and sent. Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, sees Peter and Andrew casting their net into the water. All he has to say is, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (4:19), and they leave their nets and follow him. In John's Gospel, Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, is the first to be called by Jesus; after answering the call he goes and gets Peter and brings him to Jesus (1:35–42).

St. Andrew's X refers to his cross. This apostle—the word means *sent*—was, according to tradition, martyred on an X-shaped cross. Think of it as "X marks the spot" during Advent. You are always standing in that spot, confessing with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he is coming again.



Tuesday
First Week of Advent
Wolf and Lamb

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and...lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them.

Isaiah 11:6

The prophet Isaiah likes continuums. A continuum places one thing opposite another and teases truth from the space in between. So, at one end of the continuum is a wolf, a large predatory mammal of the dog family, and at the other end is a lamb, a small weak baby of the sheep family. At one end of another continuum is a leopard, a large strong cat of the lion family, and at the other end is a kid, a young goat of the sheep family. The prophet's point is that when the shoot comes from the stump of Jesse and a branch grows out of his roots, all things opposite each other will be brought into harmony. The chaos of the world and the animosity of creatures will be transformed by a Davidic heir.

Jesus, son of David, presents his own continuum in Luke's Gospel. He praises God for having "hidden...things from the wise and the learned" and "hav[ing] revealed them to the childlike" (10:21). Isaiah would have been proud of Jesus for his continuum! Advent is a great time to draw together the opposites that exist in our families, our churches, and our work places while waiting for Jesus' return in glory. On that day, all opposites will be dissolved into perfect harmony.



Wednesday
First Week of Advent
Mountain

*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide...a
feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy,
rich food and pure, choice wines.*
Isaiah 25:6

Both God and Jesus love mountain climbing. Throughout the Old Testament, God does all his important work on a mountain. Moses receives his call on a mountain and later is given the commandments on a mountain. Elijah spends time on a mountain, finally hearing the tiny, whispering sound of God. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is known for his first sermon on the mount, and he does most of his important work atop a mountain.

So it should not surprise us that a mountain is a good picture for Advent. Isaiah depicts a great feast taking place in Jerusalem, built on Mount Zion. It is "a feast of rich food and...choice wines" (25:6). On a mountain, Jesus first feeds the crowds who accompany him with healing and then, with a few loaves and fish, he feeds the crowds with food.

Advent mountain climbing is about feasting daily on God's word through the biblical texts appointed for the day, through *lectio divina*, or through whatever Scripture you read. Advent mountain climbing takes us away from the omnipresent noise of our lives. God speaks best on a mountaintop, where he loves to provide an abundant feast.



Find glimpses of Christ in the ordinary. *Daybreaks* introduces you to the people and things of Advent and Christmas, like shepherds, the manger, gifts from the Wise Men, and St. Ambrose's poinsettia. As you prepare to celebrate Christ's birth—and ultimately his glorious return—ponder all the people and things found in these pages.

Your guide for the journey, Fr. Mark G. Boyer, combines prayers, daily reflections, and daily Scripture readings into meditations that will sustain and strengthen your faith.

Fr. Mark G. Boyer, a priest in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is the author of forty books on biblical and liturgical spirituality. He teaches Bible and film courses at Missouri State University, where he has served as an instructor for twenty-seven years. He dedicates this issue of *Daybreaks* to Mike and Carol Fasching, Linda Huber, Virginia Noller, Larry and Bev Simon, and Charles and Pamela West.

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