

Thursday December 17<sup>th</sup>, Thursday in the Third Week in Advent

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

After yesterday's miserable weather we wake up to a lovely day, although my watch is telling me that it may get a bit damp this afternoon. Hey hoo!

Today, the 17<sup>th</sup> December, we move into the second, final part of Advent, with particular readings for each day. These are special days when the thought of the expected Messiah gets very intense. Each day will give us part of the Christmas story to take us up to our Christmas Mass readings.

We go right back to the book of Genesis today. In Genesis 49:2,8-10 we are told that the kingship will never pass from the house of Jacob, the house into which Jesus will be born. *'The sceptre shall not pass from Judah, nor the mace from between his feet, until he come to whom it belongs, to whom the peoples shall render obedience.'*

This week we try to tap into the thoughts and feelings and emotions of Mary as she looks forward to the birth of her son. The Israelites were very conscious of their genealogy - today we have the genealogy for Jesus through Joseph, the husband of Mary, as recorded in Matthew 1:1-17 (St. Luke traces the line through Mary, right back to Adam). Joseph's line can be traced back to David, the greatest king of the Jews and then right back to Abraham, the father of the chosen people. Let us pray for all our families and family trees:

*Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, bless our family. Graciously inspire in us the unity, peace, and mutual love that you found in your own family in the little town of Nazareth.*

*Mary, Mother of Jesus and Our Mother, nourish our family with your faith and your love. Keep us close to your Son, Jesus, in all our sorrows and joys.*

*Joseph, Foster-father to Jesus, guardian and spouse of Mary, keep our family safe from harm. Help us in all times of discouragement or anxiety.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth, make our family one with you. Help us to be instruments of peace. Grant that love, strengthened by grace, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass. May we always have God at the centre of our hearts and homes until we are all one family, happy and at peace in our true home with you. Amen.*

Each of these days has a very special antiphon or short prayer appealing to the Lord to come. These are known as the 'O' antiphons, we the Church has been singing since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the Magnificat canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17<sup>th</sup> through to the 23<sup>rd</sup>. They are a magnificent, beautiful theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfilment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative 'Come!' embodies the longing of all for the Divine Messiah. You'll see how they have been transformed into the Advent Carol 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel.' *'O wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth.'* And why don't we sing the beautiful hymn, 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel,' definitely one of my favourite hymns for Advent, or any other time of the year, actually. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q\\_Q-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4)

It's not the feast of St. Francis of Assisi but over the past few days I've had several animal themed messages and pictures from around the world. Firstly my sister sent me a picture of an echidna that has somehow found its way into their garden. It's one of the only existing mammals that lays eggs, and only dwells in Australia and New Guinea. My brother immediately countered with a photo he took in a local metro station in Sheung Shui, one of the largest metro towns in the New Territories of Hong Kong, of a wild boar which had somehow wandered in. And then, closer to home, my mate Phil in Essex popped up with a photo taken in his presbytery garden of a thirsty fox! All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small!

*Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures.*

*You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land.*

*You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters.*

*We ask you to bless our pets.*

*By the power of your love, enable them to live according to your plan.*

*May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation.*

*Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen.*

Hope you have a good day. Don't forget we are still taking bookings for 12noon and 8pm Mass on Christmas Eve, and 10am Mass on Christmas day. Cheers!

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.