



The Secrets of Scripture:

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

BY LUMINOUS MINISTRIES

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Welcome To Advent

Saint Catherine of Siena once said, "A thousand of God's secrets are contained in a single word."

Just imagine...a thousand of God's secrets in just one word! It's astounding to contemplate and reminds us of the power of Lectio Divina, a beautiful prayer form, and one we often use to meditate on Sacred Scripture. Lectio Divina consists of four parts:

1. Reading a passage of Scripture several times over;
2. Reflecting on this passage and identifying a word, phrase, or idea that is speaking to your soul;
3. Responding to what you feel God is showing you through that word, phrase or idea;
4. Resting in this revelation as you sit with God in silence.

It occurred to us to ask the question, what would happen if we blended Lectio Divina with the spirit of St. Catherine and turned it into an Advent devotional?

Well, you're about to find out! If you are reading these words, you have the devotional right before you. Each entry offers the daily Gospel reading along with our personal experience of selecting just one word that spoke to our souls. We have included the exact line in Scripture from where the word originated. The next section offers a message, or rather, a "secret" we felt God sharing with us through that "single word." We conclude each daily meditation with a call to action where we offer three suggestions of how you might respond individually or with a group of family members or friends as you live out this 2020 Advent season.

For an additional Advent experience, we invite you to reread the entire Scripture passage and see what word speaks to *your* heart. After all, if Saint Catherine is correct, (and she wasn't declared a saint for no good reason), we are confident that God will whisper a sacred secret into your soul!

Happy Adventing!

Carol & Kristen

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 29, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Mark 13:33-37

WORD: WATCH

"May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.
What I say to you, I say to all: 'WATCH!'" ~ Mark 13:36-37

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): In my past profession as a teacher, I used to implore my students to "stay alive, alert, awake and aware." And I encourage it to this day, not just for students, but for all of us. One recommended way to do that is to keep a good "WATCH" over all that is going on around you. WATCH reactions. WATCH subtle cues. WATCH holy happenings. WATCH the traffic. WATCH the weather. WATCH the trends. WATCH what you eat. WATCH what you say. WATCH what you believe and why you believe it. WATCH the condition of your soul. That last one is particularly important as we have no idea when the Lord will return or when we will be called home. So, as you wait and WATCH, remember that we all have very specific and individual work to be doing for the kingdom. Do you know what your work is and are you doing it? Anyway you look at it, time is of the essence, as we are here for a very short stint. What we are doing to build the kingdom of God and to secure our souls for Heaven is what's lasting and laudable. Jesus is telling us in this reading that He will be returning, and His expectation is that we will all be ready, waiting, and WATCHFUL. "What I say to you, I say to all: 'WATCH!'"

RESPONSE:

1. Be extra vigilant at Mass and WATCH every movement of the priest, hear the prayers as if listening for the first time, hear the sounds coming from the sanctuary, and then name three things that you've never noticed before about the signs and wonders of the Mass.
2. Take five minutes and WATCH your thoughts. Ask God to help you change any negative thoughts to holy and inspiring thoughts.
3. Go outside tonight by yourself or with your family and WATCH God's creation in action. What do you see, hear, touch, and smell? What new thoughts do you have about the moment you're sharing?

1ST MONDAY OF ADVENT

November 30, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 4:18-22

WORD: CALLED

"He [Jesus] CALLED them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him." ~ Matthew 4:21-22

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): "Don't answer, unless it's God!" These were the words Catholic singer, Jesse Manibusan, shouted to the crowd as a phone started ringing. I, along with everyone else in the church, started to laugh. But what if? Wouldn't it be wonderful if Jesus did CALL us on our cell phones? And just because He hasn't used that mode of communication doesn't mean He hasn't CALLED. Just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is CALLING us, too. What area of your life are you answering the CALL? What area of your life are you sending Him straight to voicemail? The phone is ringing, and it's for you. Jesus is CALLING.

RESPONSE:

1. Be inspired to answer the CALL by listening to Jesse Manibusan's "Fish with Me."
2. CALL an Andrew in your life and tell them how they inspire you to answer Jesus' CALL.
3. Pray the St. Andrew Christmas Novena starting today!

1ST TUESDAY OF ADVENT

December 1, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 10:21-24

WORD: CHILDLIKE

"...you have revealed them to the CHILDLIKE." ~ Luke 10:21

"MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): All truth will eventually be revealed. And we're not talking about my truth, or your truth...nor the truth of a particular party or group. We're also not talking about the truth of past, present, or future world leadership. We're talking about God's truth, which is the only truth that matters. It is also the only real truth, and our job is to be able to discern real truth from non-truth, which can be tricky. That's why Jesus so often referred to the CHILDLIKE manner in which we should conduct ourselves. Why? Because children tend to be innocent, trusting, humble, and grace-filled. They seem to have a knack for accepting real truth and sniffing out lies or questioning "why" until they are given a true answer that suffices. Let's take our cue from children and seek the truth by constantly questioning until we are given what ultimately suffices, God's truth.

RESPONSE:

1. Observe a young CHILD for several minutes? How are they different from most adults?
2. Offer to babysit for a young CHILD in your family, church, or neighborhood just out of the kindness of your heart and journal five ways that your heart was lightened.
3. Think of a challenge you are facing and then ask a CHILD what they would do if they had this challenge. Listen carefully and enjoy their novel ideas. You might just find a solution.

1ST WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

December 2, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 15:29-37

WORD: HUNGRY

"...I do not want to send them away HUNGRY,
for fear they may collapse on the way." ~ Matthew 15:32

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): Hanger is a real thing! But if you look up the word "hanger" in the dictionary, the definition is going to be something about a configuration of wire used to hang up clothes. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is being so HUNGRY you are angry...hence, hanger. So, as a person who suffers from this malady, I appreciate our Lord's attention to tummies in today's Gospel reading. Jesus says, and I quote, "I do not want to send them away HUNGRY, for fear they may collapse on the way." And what does Jesus do? He performs an epic miracle where the food just keeps on coming! Sounds like a taste of Heaven to me! But in all seriousness, this points us to a beautiful truth about Jesus. What's that truth? Jesus always feeds both our physical and spiritual HUNGER. How can we do the same? Well, most people eat at least two meals a day, so why not make this a sacred, spiritual experience? Let's do what Jesus did and simultaneously feed our bodies *and* souls. Let us neither physically, nor spiritually get hangry this Advent season!

RESPONSE:

1. Plan a meal with a message! Arrange your fruit or veggies in the shape of a fish (see food art on Pinterest!), then read the Gospel over dinner, and share one way Jesus fed you spiritually today.
2. Volunteer at a homeless shelter or donate food to your local food pantry to follow Jesus' example to feed the HUNGRY. If you do this, you will also be practicing a Corporal Work of Mercy! Yay!
3. Make a meal for someone who could use a pick me up! Put a little note with it telling them how much Jesus loves them!

1ST THURSDAY OF ADVENT

December 3, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 7:21, 24-27

WORD: LISTENS

"Everyone who LISTENS to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." ~ Matthew 7:24

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): Back in the day, I used to teach LISTENING skills to my Oral Communications students. I would begin by telling them that of the four main modes of communication (reading, writing, speaking, and LISTENING), we spend the most time learning how to use the mode we actually use the least. The mode we use the least is writing, and, yet, this is where we focus the majority of our energies. The mode we use the most, LISTENING, is the one we are given little or no training in the world of academia. I remember sharing that in a day's time we spend, on average, 9% writing, 16% reading, 30% speaking, and 45% LISTENING. I would then ask how many of them had ever taken a LISTENING course? Virtually 100% would say something to the effect that they had never taken a LISTENING course, and most of them agreed that my speech class was the one and only speech class they had ever taken. However, they had spent a large percentage of their school day learning how to read and write. Does everyone see the irony? The two modes of communication most used in a day (speaking and LISTENING) are the two skill sets we spend the least amount of time learning how to do efficiently and effectively. I aimed to do something about that in my communications class and I like to think Jesus was excited about that decision. After all, He was all about people becoming truly wise, which in His wisdom amounted, in part, to knowing how to be a good LISTENER. Are you are good LISTENER? Do you LISTEN with the intent to understand rather than reply? Do you look at the person you're LISTENING to? Do you refrain from interrupting? Do you watch for non-verbal cues? Are you empathetic? Do you focus more on the message than the actual words? Are you careful not to jump to conclusions? Can you honestly say "yes" to all of those questions? If so, you're the kind of LISTENER that Jesus would refer to as wise!

RESPONSE:

1. Get in the habit of asking every person you encounter three questions about themselves before saying anything about yourself. And really LISTEN to their responses so that you can honestly say "yes" to all of the questions presented above.
2. Read today's Gospel passage to your family. Then give them a piece of paper and ask them to write down everything they can remember about the passage. After several minutes, reread the passage. Then ask them to add to their original list of things they remember. What most people learn is that they're lazy LISTENERS, and if they want to become better, they need to work at LISTENING. This Advent, commit to becoming a more effective LISTENER.
3. LISTEN to yourself. Do you sound kind, cheerful, light-hearted, compassionate, encouraging, hopeful and loving? If not, commit to changing. As the saying goes "Whatever you are not changing, you are choosing."

1ST FRIDAY OF ADVENT

December 4, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 9:27-31

WORD: BLIND

"As Jesus passed by, two BLIND men followed him, crying out,
'Son of David, have pity on us!'" ~ Matthew 9:27

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): I've often pondered the question, if I had to lose one of my senses, which would I choose? It would be devastating to relinquish any of the five, but after deliberation, I begrudgingly resign myself to the loss of smell. Smell seems the least disruptive to my daily life. But to live without the scent of flowers, or cookies, or beloved family members makes my heart sink. But I choose smell, because I truly cannot imagine life without taste, touch, sound, and definitely not without my sight. The inability to see the faces of friends, the snow kissing the earth, the creativity of our Creator, and so much more would be unimaginable. But then I remember the words of "Amazing Grace" and recall that I. Am. BLIND. I am often BLIND to what is really important. I am often BLIND to the beauty around me because I am buried in the work on my MacBook. I am often BLIND to the truths of the Catholic faith and BLIND to my own failure to uphold these truths. It really is only by faith that we become aware of our BLINDNESS and can then cry out to God to help us see. Allow the light from your Advent wreath to help you find your way from darkness to light.

RESPONSE:

1. Sing "Amazing Grace" and ask God to help you become aware of your BLINDNESS and to help you to see.
2. Study braille and maybe even challenge yourself to learn braille! This increases our compassion for our BLIND brothers and sisters in Christ and can help us correspond.
3. Follow reliable Catholics on social media and allow them to shed light on areas of your life where you may be BLIND.

1ST SATURDAY OF ADVENT

December 5, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5A, 6–8

WORD: MOVED

"At the sight of the crowds, his heart was MOVED with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd." ~ Matthew 9:36

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): This scripture passage, like so many, is relevant to our times. Who among us can honestly look around at the crowds and not hope and pray that Jesus' heart is still MOVED with pity for all the lost and troubled souls...all those roaming about looking like sheep without a shepherd. Thank goodness Scripture reassures us that God is the same yesterday, today, and always. And if Jesus could be MOVED with pity for the people of His time, He can and is MOVED with pity for all of us today. With all this MOVEMENT going on, let's make sure we are paying it forward and following Jesus' example with every opportunity we get to be MOVED with pity for others. What opportunities has God given you in just the past 24 hours to be MOVED with pity and how did you respond?

RESPONSE:

1. Buy a gift or several gifts for someone who can't reciprocate and deliver the gift(s) anonymously.
2. Eat dinner as a family by the light of your Advent wreath and share all the ways you were MOVED with pity today for your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. Go to reconciliation so your soul can truly be prepared to receive the Savior. Cleansing your soul will more thoroughly help you to live the Christian life and MOVE you to discover the face of Christ in every person you greet.

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 6, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Mark 1:1-8

WORD: WATER

"I have baptized you with WATER;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ~ Mark 1:8

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): Anyone else missing holy WATER at Mass? Me too! In fact, I still attempt to dip my hand into the font only to remember, the font is empty. This holy habit is what prompted my husband and me to get a holy WATER font for our home. We had been looking for one since we got married, but you know how it is, life got busy, decisions didn't get made, and next thing we knew we had been married for over a year and still had no holy WATER font in our home. It wasn't until the pandemic hit that we both had an insatiable desire for holy WATER. What resulted was a scouring of the internet for the perfect font, the one that would inspire us in one glimpse, and, as an avid lover of all things interior design, fit our decor. We finally found it and placed our order. Little did we know this company was located in Italy! So we waited. Actually, we impatiently waited. We wanted our font and we wanted it now! Finally, the delivery was made to our door. Once we determined the perfect spot in our home, we immediately put it up, only to realize we had no holy WATER. But we were not about to let our efforts be thwarted! So I rectified the situation by taking a jug of water to a weekday Mass where Father then took the WATER and performed the Order of Blessing. And, wow, was that Order of Blessing ever beautiful! Afterwards, I couldn't get in my car fast enough to rush home with my newly blessed agua. Upon arrival, my husband paused his work and we poured the WATER into our font. We then said a prayer and blessed ourselves. This has now become a holy habit. And every time we walk past our font, or sense the need for extra grace, we dip our hands in this basin and bless ourselves. This practice of blessing helps us feel sacred and centered on Christ. It has been a game changer for our spiritual lives, and could be for you, too, starting this Advent season. So stop missing holy WATER and get it in your home!

RESPONSE:

1. Purchase a holy WATER font.
2. Get holy WATER.
3. Bless yourself today with this WATER that reminds you of the grace of your baptism and does a host of other things, like help you resist temptation, drive away sickness, cleanse you of venial sin, and so much more! Look up all the benefits of holy WATER, you'll be glad you did!

2ND MONDAY OF ADVENT

December 7, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 5:17-26

WORD: RISE

""But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'
- he said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, RISE,
pick up your stretcher, and go home.'" ~ Luke 5:24

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): I like the word RISE. I like the sound of it and I like everything it implies. I like that it gets us moving in a heavenly and holy direction. As an example, when you hear the words, RISE up, do they inflate or deflate? For me, they inflate and encourage me to get moving and get doing the next right thing in God's eyes. All of us, like the paralytic in the story, have some kind of paralyzation, something that keeps us from RISING up. Maybe it's our fear that paralyzes us. Maybe it's our insecurity or our perfectionism. Maybe it's our bad habits or the bad company we keep. Perhaps our moral fiber paralyzes us, or our distrust in God's ability to see us through a difficult season. Perhaps this one word can become your Advent mission statement: RISE! That's right!! RISE up, get going, and just start doing and thinking the next right thing in God's eyes.

RESPONSE:

1. Study Saint Gemma Galgani, a patron saint of hope. Through her intercession we can better RISE up and completely surrender our lives to God as we trust in His mercy and love. Allow the graces of that intercession to give you the strength to do great works of charity this Advent season.
2. Call someone who is down and out and could use some cheering up. Make sure your conversation has many uplifting and hopeful messages that will help the recipient to better RISE up and continue their journey with new vigor and vitality!
3. RISE up and dance! Jeremiah 31:13 says, "Then the virgins shall make merry and dance, and young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will console and gladden them after their sorrows."

2ND TUESDAY OF ADVENT

December 8, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:26-38

WORD: RELATIONS

"How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" ~ Luke 1:34

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): RELATIONS! Whose RELATIONS are we celebrating today on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary? St. Anne and St. Joachim, the parents of Mary and the grandparents of Jesus! If you are utterly confused, you are not alone. A very high percentage of Catholics often confuse the Immaculate Conception to mean Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary. But, the Immaculate Conception of Mary is the celebration of St. Anne and St. Joachim, coming together in love, to immaculately conceive Mary. If you don't know much about these two, St. Anne and St. Joachim, I highly recommend picking up or downloading the book by Venerable Mary of Agreda entitled, "The Mystical City of God." In it, there is an account of all the events that led up to the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The details are fascinating! Another fascinating fact about the Immaculate Conception is that this means Mary was born without original sin. And it is because of this that the Angel Gabriel, greets her and says, "Hail Mary, Full of Grace."

RESPONSE:

1. Learn about Mary's parents and Jesus' grandparents, St. Anne and St. Joachim, by reading, "The Mystical City of God" by Venerable Mary of Agreda.
2. Grant yourself grace today.
3. Send a spiritual bouquet card to a pregnant woman praying for the health and holiness of her child, so that this baby might be covered in grace.

2ND WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

December 9, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 11:28-30

WORD: COME

"COME to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest." ~ Matthew 11:28

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): St Porphyrios once said, "When people are empty of Christ, a thousand and one other things COME and fill them up: jealousies, hatred, boredom, melancholy, resentment, a worldly outlook, worldly pleasures. Try to fill your soul with Christ so that it's not empty." In other words, COME to Jesus and be filled and fulfilled.

RESPONSE:

1. Listen to the song "COME To Us, Jesus" by Steve Angrisano, then enjoy a silent meditation focusing on the message of the lyrics.
2. COME together around the Advent wreath with family or friends. Have everyone put their name in a cup and then share a prayer about the importance of encouraging others. After the prayer, draw a name and commit to doing a random act of kindness for that person in the next week.
3. COME together as a family with any book of your choosing (but an Advent book would be nice). Have everyone take turns opening to a random page, swirling their finger around the page with their eyes closed. When the designated family member says "stop," find the closest noun to your finger and tell the group something about your faith life based on that noun.

2ND THURSDAY OF ADVENT

December 10, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 11:11-15

WORD: VIOLENCE

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers VIOLENCE, and the violent are taking it by force." ~ Matthew 11:12

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): "What a jerk!" I said this recently after scrolling through social media and seeing a nasty post. I was disgusted and I chose to verbalize it. That night, as my husband and I were praying the Rosary, I felt God tugging at my heart, so I picked up my phone and sent a message, not affirming the nasty comment, but affirming a love and care for this soul. And this story brings me to today's Gospel reading and the passage, "the Kingdom of Heaven suffers VIOLENCE." I'm no Biblical scholar, but I take this to mean that our earthly actions have eternal consequences. Those eternal consequences can equate to significantly less souls in Heaven. The thought of any soul being lost should devastate and challenge us. What are we to do about it? How about being classy Catholics! This means we stand up for what we believe in without resorting to name calling to the persons' face or behind their back.

RESPONSE:

1. Commit to praying the Chaplet of the Divine mercy for a soul you struggle to love.
2. Send a note to someone you have called a name, affirming them in the areas they deserve praise.
3. Level up. Eradicate name calling from your vernacular. Instead, maybe take a line from our southern friends and say, "Bless her/his heart."

2ND FRIDAY OF ADVENT

December 11, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 11:16-19

WORD: WISDOM

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said,
'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'
But WISDOM is vindicated by her works." ~ Matthew 11:19

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): When I hear the word WISDOM, I can't help but think of my Aunt Eulitta. She is WISE in the ways of the Lord. That's what I've watched my entire life. She just gets it. She's always gotten it. And it's completely obvious by the way she lives her life. She is up on all current events locally, nationally, and internationally, despite not having the convenience of technology at her fingertips, and doesn't mince words in telling you who and what supports the tenets of the Catholic faith. She prays for everyone and everything. She attends Mass every chance she gets. And she is quick to remind us that we're not going to live forever, therefore, we need to have our souls ready at all times. Even in extreme moments, like the day she received the news that her beloved husband (my Uncle Ray) had thrown a clot and was going to die in the next 24-48 hours, she was the epitome of grace under pressure. Her first thought was to call a priest to assure he received the Sacrament of the Sick and every conceivable blessing. She then led the entire family in the Rosary around his bedside. What a warrior of WISDOM and a true expert at keeping the main thing the main thing. And the main thing for her is God and all things eternal. Everything she thinks, says, does and assumes oozes of the Creator and His very important role in her life. For my Aunt Eulitta, God is, and always has been, front and center and precious and pivotal. I've been wanting to ask her for several years now where her unwavering faith and courage and insatiable desire to live in His light came from, and I need to ask quickly. You see, she was just handed a devastating diagnosis and is not expected to be with us much longer. And how did she react to this daunting news? With the same spirit of grace and strength and fortitude and faithfulness she has always possessed. In her WISDOM, she is using every second she has left to prepare her soul and the souls of all the loved ones she will be leaving behind. What a blessing this sweet soul is to me and my family. I love you, Aunt Eulitta, and I thank God for your constant testimony of truth and WISDOM. I've been watching all these years. We've all been watching.

RESPONSE:

1. Who have you been watching this Advent season to help you grow in truth and WISDOM?
2. Contemplate the life of Jesus, particularly what we learn from Luke 2:52 ~ "And Jesus advanced [in] WISDOM and age and favor before God and man." Are you doing the same?
3. Be intentional, deliberate, and WISE about the gifts you buy for Christmas this year. Think about how this gift will help bring the recipient closer to God. Attach a note that shares the meaning behind the gift.

2ND SATURDAY OF ADVENT

December 12, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:26-38

WORD: HOW

But Mary said to the angel, "HOW can this be,
since I have no relations with a man?" ~ Luke 1:34

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): HOW? This is a question asked both by St. Zechariah and the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Both had been visited by the Angel Gabriel and both were given big news! St. Zechariah was informed that even though he and his wife were elderly, they would conceive and bear a child and call him John. Mary was informed that she was to give birth to the Son of God. Understandably, they both asked, "HOW?" However, the response from this heavenly harbinger is vastly different. To Zechariah's, "HOW" he is struck mute. To Mary's, "HOW" she is given an explanation. I dare to ask an interrogatory question...why? Because, in the case of St. Zechariah, he asks, "HOW" from a place of doubt and disbelief that two old people would be able to give birth to a child. Mary's "HOW" is questioning HOW this will come to be, not from a place of doubt, but of true wonder. You might recall that Mary had made a vow of perpetual virginity. This has been the long professed belief of the Church stemming back to Church Fathers, St. Gregory and St. Augustine. Not only is Mary's vow the longstanding teaching of the Church, but because she was espoused to Joseph, she would have known exactly HOW this might come to be. The only explanation is that she intended to remain a perpetual virgin. What questions do you find yourself asking God this Advent season? And what are your true motivations?

RESPONSE:

1. Research Mary's vow of Perpetual Virginity.
2. Learn about consecrated virgins in the Catholic Church.
3. Study the Marian apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe whose feast is celebrated today!

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 13, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ John 1:6-8, 19-28

WORD: LIGHT

"A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony,
to testify to the LIGHT, so that all might believe through him.
He was not the LIGHT but came to testify to the LIGHT." ~ John 1:6-8

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): If we were to chronicle the sights of Advent and Christmas, certainly the burning candles on Advent wreaths and the gleaming sparkles of Christmas tree LIGHTS would make the cut. Both symbolize the presence of LIGHT to a darkened world and both have always calmed and comforted my spirit. I even remember one evening during my teenage years, laying on my back with my head tucked under the Christmas tree. I was situated in such a way that I could see all the lights from the very bottom of the tree all the way up. It had been a particularly difficult and frustrating day and I was feeling pretty down in the dumps. I still remember the effect those LIGHTS had on my mood as slowly things seemed to shift toward a better sense of LIGHTNESS and hopefulness. And isn't that as it should be? After all, that's why Jesus came in the first place ~ to bring LIGHT to a darkened world.

RESPONSE:

1. Make some hot chocolate, gather with family and/or friends, LIGHT your Advent wreath, and share how God brought LIGHT to your world in the past 24 hours.
2. Fill in the following sentence and share with family and/or friends via zoom, a phone call, a text, an email, or in-person: I brought LIGHT to _____(name) today by _____. (Act of kindness)
3. Bring LIGHT into your center of influence by being an encourager. Encouragement can come in the form of quick note, a phone call, a sincere prayer, a shared meal, or a small gift showing how much you care.

3RD MONDAY OF ADVENT

December 14, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 21:23-27

WORD: AUTHORITY

When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, "By what AUTHORITY are you doing these things? And who gave you this AUTHORITY?" ~ Matthew 21:23

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): In today's Gospel, the chief priests and elders ask Jesus who gave Him AUTHORITY to do what He does? I'd like to flip this question and put it back on us. To whom do we give AUTHORITY? Political pundits? Our peers? Our priests? Our bosses? Our family? Our neighbors? Our friends? Who do we allow to ultimately determine how we live our lives? I hope the answer would be God and His Church, the Catholic Church. Sadly, so often, even Catholics, the clergy and all, give allegiance and AUTHORITY to others, and in the political arena, cry separation of church and state. Without going into a long dissertation, separation of church and state was initially established to keep the state out of the affairs of the church, not the other way around. America was founded on faith. That is why at every inauguration the president is sworn in with his hand on a Bible. That is why our coins read, "In God we trust." And that is why our pledge states, "one nation under God." God is meant to be in every arena of our lives. And why is this? Because how can you have life and liberty and freedom and justice and truth without the source of Truth? There is natural law and it comes from the Author of Life and the One we should give all AUTHORITY...God.

RESPONSE:

1. Study Catholic Social Teaching and then uphold it in your life.
2. Find a flag and say the pledge of allegiance, giving extra oomph to "one nation, under God!"
3. Meditate on these words by St. John of the Cross whose memorial we celebrate today: "Who teaches the soul if not God?"

3RD TUESDAY OF ADVENT

December 15, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 21:28-32

WORD: WORK

"...go out and WORK in the vineyard today." ~ Matthew 21:28

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): Just moments before writing this very meditation, I texted a dear friend who recently lost her loving husband very unexpectedly. In the text, I shared that in my experience healing is hard, hard work. Ask anyone who has ever had to attempt to heal from the loss of a loved one. And it's not just healing from deaths of family members and friends that is hard work. Job responsibilities are hard WORK. Running a household is hard WORK. Paying bills is hard WORK. So is adulting, volunteering, studying, serving, and even attempting to get some much needed zzzzz's! I'm in the camp that thinks that much of life on this side of heaven is hard WORK. Even preparing your heart for Jesus during the season of Advent can be hard WORK. And Jesus doesn't try to convince us otherwise. That's why He is constantly encouraging us to fight the good fight, stay in the race, and keep the faith! What kind of WORK have you entered into this Advent season to get your heart ready for your Savior? And where has the WORK of that spiritual journey led?

RESPONSE:

1. Journal today the hard WORK you intentionally did to grow closer to our Savior.
2. Ask a family member or friend several specific questions about their WORK and then ask them how you can best support and pray for them in regards to the WORK they do.
3. WORK at recognizing God at WORK in your life by doing "The 24/7" ~ which is simply looking carefully and prayerfully at the past 24 hours and finding seven very specific things you have to be grateful for...and then writing them down in your planner, journal, or phone so you can look back and see how particularly God has provided for you.

3RD WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

December 16, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 7:18B-23

WORD: TELL

"And Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and TELL John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." ~ Luke 7:22

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): "Go TELL what you have seen and heard." Oh, Lord, don't worry, I've got that on lockdown. Growing up I was the biggest tattler. I'm shocked my siblings ever forgave me for ratting out their every move. But in today's Gospel reading, Jesus isn't talking about TELLING the bad stuff that's happening in the world, but sharing the good and straight up miraculous things He is doing. How often does God do something amazing in your life and you share that story for a time and then forget about it or cease to share? In this verse, Jesus is encouraging us to go out into the world and continuously share the Good News, the Gospel, the miraculous adventure that is a life with Christ! So what are you waiting for? Get on the horn and share a story or two!

RESPONSE:

1. Answer this question tonight at the dinner table, "What is one of the most amazing things you've seen God do in your life or in the life of someone you know?"
2. Begin every conversation you have today with a piece of good news!
3. Play a game of Scrabble and with every word you create you must come up with a corresponding story to TELL of God's goodness.

3RD THURSDAY OF ADVENT

December 17, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 1:1-17

WORD: FATHER

"...Jacob the FATHER of Joseph, the husband of Mary.
Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah." ~ Matthew 1:16

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): From the time I was young girl, to this very day, one of my favorite Catholic hymns is and always will be "Abba, FATHER" by Carey Landry. Absorb the lyrics for yourself and see where the journey might take you: Abba...Abba, FATHER...You are the potter....we are the clay...the work of Your hands....mold us....mold us and fashion us....into the image of Jesus, Your Son...of Jesus, Your Son...FATHER...may we be one in You...may we be one in You, as He is in You...and You are in Him...Glory...Glory and praise to You...Glory and praise to You forever amen...forever, Amen. How are you allowing yourself to be molded and fashioned by the FATHER this Advent season more and more into the image of Jesus?

RESPONSE:

1. Write a note to your FATHER, or someone who has been a FATHER-figure in your life, sharing how much you have appreciated their FATHERLY love and protection.
2. Go on a spiritual treasure hunt through the Bible looking for all the male figures who were patriarchal and FATHERLY. Challenge yourself to come up with at least ten biblical characters, then list two or three things about each one specifically that you think defined them as a loving FATHER.
3. Pray for your FATHER, whether living or deceased, and thank God for the role he is playing or once played in your life. Pray for his soul and for the resurgence of good and faithful FATHERHOOD.

3RD FRIDAY OF ADVENT

December 18, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 1:18-25

WORD: EMMANUEL

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him EMMANUEL, which means 'God is with us.'" ~ Matthew 1:23

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): Recently, Mom, Dad, and I did something we had never done before. We prayed outside of an abortion clinic as a part of a Mass and March for Life. The day began with a beautiful celebration of the Sacred Liturgies. Then, with a Eucharistic procession, we began our march to the last remaining abortion facility, Capital Care, in Toledo, Ohio. All the while we marched, we prayed the Rosary. It felt so holy, so uplifting, so hopeful. But as we neared the facility, you could physically, palpably, feel the change. A heaviness and darkness was descending. It began when I looked to my right and saw what I thought were two women standing outside their home with signs supporting the right to life. However, I was wrong. These women stood there and glared at us while holding their signs filled with hateful rhetoric. And then, I could hear the screaming. The screaming of the protestors who chanted over and over again "We are here to take a stand. We want abortions on demand." And "Get your rosaries off my ovaries." Everywhere you looked there were hateful signs and people screaming foul language. And even though there were police officers everywhere, I started to get very scared. I started to allow the darkness to draw my attention away from the light. But then, I remembered we had EMMANUEL, God with us. I reminded myself of the words of one of my favorite saints, St. Joan of Arc, "I am not afraid, for God is with me, I was born to do this." And so we marched onward to pray for an end to abortion, to pray for healing for those mothers and fathers affected by abortion, to pray for the conversion of those abortion workers, and to pray for the over 61 million innocent Americans who have lost their lives to abortion.

RESPONSE:

1. Pray outside an abortion facility. Visit 40 Days for Life to learn more.
2. Carry around the Baby Jesus from your nativity in your pocket until Christmas Eve, then put Him in the manger. This way you will remember, God is with us!
3. Listen to the song "EMMANUEL, God With Us" by Point of Grace.

3RD SATURDAY OF ADVENT

December 19, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:5-25

WORD: WAITING

"Meanwhile the people were WAITING for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary." ~ Luke 1:21

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): We all know what it's like to have to WAIT and it often requires various degrees of patience. WAITING in a line is hard enough, but WAITING for your medical test results or for a loved one to make a right decision is much more challenging. I have begrudgingly figured out that God's timeline is significantly different than my own and that the best thing I can do (if I'm smart), is to surrender to His will and WAIT out the thing that I'm anxious to have happen this very minute. Only God knows all the intricate details involved in the WAIT and the ripple of those details as they affect untold numbers of people and situations. As we WAIT these last couple of days for the arrival of Christmas, may we willingly offer up prayers of patience and surrender for ourselves and all who are in the WAITING game.

RESPONSE:

1. Contemplate privately or with a small group the words of Pope St. John Paul II ~ "It is necessary to understand that the whole of our life must be an 'advent' ~ a vigilant WAITING of the coming of Christ."
2. Pray while WAITING...in line, at stoplights, for your computer to boot up. After all, the average person spends five years of their life WAITING, and praying is time well spent. Remember that if we could physically see the difference our prayers make, we would never come off of our knees.
3. Listen to "While I'm WAITING" by John Waller and either journal your thoughts or have a family discussion about some portion of the lyrics that stood out to each family member.

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:26-38

WORD: ANGEL

"The ANGEL Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary." ~ Luke 1:26-27

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): ANGEL encounters are all over the Bible, especially in the events leading up to Jesus' birth. From St. Zechariah to the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Joseph, they all had experiences with these heavenly beings. How about you? Have you ever had an ANGEL encounter? Do you know someone who has? I do! A dear friend of mine was once lost in a parking garage and weighed down by a handful of bags. Being quite elderly at the time, she started to panic as she knew she physically could not keep walking and carrying these heavy bags. She cried out to God for help. Immediately a car with tinted windows pulled up alongside her. The window was rolled down and a few wild looking young adults greeted her. They asked if she needed help. Unsure of whether she was going to her death, but too tired to care, she accepted their help and got in the car. After a few moments of buzzing around the parking garage, they found her vehicle. My friend offered to pay them for their help, but they refused to take the money and persisted, "We don't need it. We don't need it." However, my friend insisted and gave them a twenty dollar bill and went on her way. Just a few days later an envelope came to her home, addressed to her. It had no return address and no letter. Inside the envelope was simply a \$20 bill. She had never told these strangers her name, nor where she lived. As chills ran up and down her arms she remembered their words, "We don't need it. We don't need it." My friend insists that was a day she entertained ANGELS unaware. Wow! Can you even imagine? Check this out too! Did you know that we each have our own Guardian ANGEL...a heavenly being assigned just to us! Do you talk to your ANGEL? Clearly these heralds are here to help, so get the conversation started!

RESPONSE:

1. Pray the Guardian ANGEL Prayer: "ANGEL of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen."
2. Answering the question, "What do you think your ANGEL has to say about you when kibitzing with the other ANGELS?"
3. Share your own ANGEL encounter or one you've heard.

4TH MONDAY OF ADVENT

December 21, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:39-45

WORD: FULFILLED

"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you
by the Lord would be FULFILLED." ~ Luke 1:45

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): One of my most earnest prayers to God is that I will be able to FULFILL the role that God has chosen for me...and that my family will do the same. I know in my heart that God has some very specific work for me that no one else can accomplish quite the same way. If I say no to this work, it will not get done...or someone else will have to do it, and there is the chance that it won't be done quite the way God was hoping if I had not refused to answer His call. Therefore, I continue to pray that I will understand and respond correctly to God's will for my life and that I will FULFILL His desires. I pray that I will willingly do the thing that I was born to do. And I take courage from St. Catherine of Siena who once said, "Become who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

RESPONSE:

1. Do some form of random creative work that you find FULFILLING and faith-filled. Write a poem, paint a picture, design a web page, make your own gifts.
2. The average person has between 50,000 and 70,000 thoughts per day, which is about 35 to 48 thoughts per minute...how many of your thoughts could be described as FULFILLING to God. Take some time to discuss with family or friends how you might make your life more FULFILLING and in line with God's plans for you.
3. Take a leisurely adventure by yourself or with family or friends. Instead of walking or driving from Point A to Point B the same way you always do, take a different path. And while you're at it, stop at a random spot and discover something new about yourself, about life, and about living of life of FULFILLMENT in Christ.

4TH TUESDAY OF ADVENT

December 22, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:46-56

WORD: PROCLAIMS

"Mary said: 'My soul PROCLAIMS the greatness of the Lord...' ~ Luke 1:46

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): "My soul PROCLAIMS the greatness of the Lord." (Luke 1:46) These are the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary in today's Gospel reading also known as Mary's Magnificat. Now, I don't know about you, but my soul absolutely does not always PROCLAIM the greatness of the Lord. In fact, I went through a pretty intense time where I felt like God hated me. And while I tried to keep the faith and continue the race, I would sit at Mass extremely angry with God and the Church. But harkening back to Mary, she could have chosen an angry response as well. After all, she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, which was amazing, but who was going to believe her? "I'm pregnant with the Savior of the world." "Right, I'm sure." To make the stakes even higher, women in this day and age were stoned for matters such as this! Her physical life could have been in danger. And to top it off, her husband was getting ready to divorce her! Let me tell you, if this was me, I can honestly say that the first words out of my mouth would not have been, "My soul PROCLAIMS the greatness of the Lord." But this is just one example of how Mary constantly points us to what is most important...and that is her Son. The very fact that Jesus came to save us from our sin supersedes any other darkness we might encounter. And this challenges us, even in our darkest moments, to search for the ways that our soul, too, might PROCLAIM the greatness of the Lord.

RESPONSE:

1. Play Scattergories and get extra points anytime you use a word associated with Mary, Advent, or gratitude.
2. Find one element of gratitude to God in a dark situation in your life.
3. Write your own words to the Magnificat. Begin "My soul PROCLAIMS the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has... (what has He done for you?)

4TH WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

December 23, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:57-66

WORD: REJOICED

"Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they REJOICED with her." ~ Luke 1:58

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): Christmas is almost upon us, and, likely, you can feel the anticipation in the air, perhaps in the smell of fresh pine, roasted chestnuts or warm gingerbread! Maybe this year, more than most, you are aware of the importance of faith, family, friends and shared fellowship. Between Covid, the political climate, growing worldwide tension, and life in general, 2020, for many, has been a year of tension and trauma. But it has also, for me, been a year of searching for that place of real peace, strength, and courage. And thankfully, I have found it to be a year of REJOICING in the fact that I know Jesus, that I love Him, and that I believe all that He came to tell us. I'm rejoicing that Mary said "yes" and that Joseph trusted his dream encounter with the angel. I REJOICE that Jesus was born, that He died for me, and that He's coming back. And I REJOICE that Jesus has an amazing future planned for all of us who put our faith in Him. So, join me in REJOICING that we know the story...that we know how it ends...and that we know we are called to play our own role in the plan. Christmas is almost upon us. Let Him find us REJOICING and playing our role when IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE THAT BIRTHDAY OF ALL BIRTHDAYS!

RESPONSE:

1. REJOICE in the good news that God works with what is, not with what was, or what should have been, or what might be. God works with what is...and that's definitely a good reason to REJOICE!
2. REJOICE in the lives of our saints and study their particular attributes. Especially during Advent, you might study the lives of St. Anne, St. Joachim, St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth and St. Zachariah.
3. Go around the dinner table filling in the blank, "I REJOICED when I heard _____."

4TH THURSDAY OF ADVENT

December 24, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ Luke 1:67-79

WORD: FREE

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
for he has come to his people and set them FREE." ~ Luke 1:68

MESSAGE/SECRET (KRISTEN): As a kid, I can remember barely sleeping on Christmas Eve because I was out-of-my-mind-excited to see what gifts Santa would be bringing me on Christmas morning. And while Santa is well and good, we often forget the most meaningful, the most important gift given this night is our Savior, Jesus Christ. And with Jesus, the gifts just keep on coming! He, Himself, is the greatest gift to the world because He gave us the gift of FREEDOM from our sins, which opened us up to the gift of eternal life! The Gospel reading for Christmas Eve day shows St. Zechariah thanking God for his many gifts. This entire prophesy by St. Zechariah is such an inspirational outcry. He speaks of all the promises God has kept to His people. He speaks to the truth that God can be trusted. He speaks to the fact that we have been saved and set FREE. So as you lay down your head to drift off to bed, and dreams of sugarplum fairies fill your head, perhaps this year the reason you can't fall asleep will be because you are out-of-your-mind-excited about the gift of your FREEDOM, about the gift of eternal life...and all because of the gift of the infant baby Jesus.

RESPONSE:

1. Before you open presents, read the nativity of Jesus and remember what we are actually celebrating.
2. For every gift you open this Christmas season share out loud a gift from God you received in the past year.
3. In celebration of your FREEDOM from sin, make a free-will donation to an organization that helps the needy.

1ST DAY OF CHRISTMAS

December 25, 2020

Gospel Reading ~ John 1:1-18

WORD: GLORY

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we saw his GLORY, the GLORY as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." ~ John 1:14

MESSAGE/SECRET (CAROL): One can only imagine what the GLORY described in today's Gospel reading actually looks and feels like...a GLORY "full of truth and grace!" Today is Christmas! That's right, Advent is over and Christmas has finally arrived. What a GLORIOUS day to live the words of St. Ambrose of Milan, who invites us to "Open wide your door to the one who comes. Open your soul, throw open the depths of your heart to see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the sweetness of grace. Open your heart and run to meet the Sun of eternal light that illuminates all men." Yes! Jesus Christ is born! "GLORY to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14) Merry Christmas!!

RESPONSE:

1. Make a birthday cake for Jesus and sing Happy Birthday to our Savior in all your GLORY!
2. Sing one verse of "Angels We Have Heard on High" together with family and friends and then share one way that you are going to commit to GLORIFYING God by being a more loving and peaceful person. End with a second verse of "Angels We Have Heard on High" and highlight those GLORIAS!
3. Think back on this day and recall the most GLORIOUS moment you had with Jesus your Savior.