



Journey to Our Lady

**Advent/Christmas 2016
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My Dear Friends,

Now is the time to come together and hold onto all that is great and good. In this festive time of year, let us remember that by the power of God’s love, the Word was made flesh in Mary the Blessed Virgin so that we may receive the divine graces needed for our salvation.

Therefore, as we celebrate the seasons of Advent and Christmas, let us embrace the gifts God wants to bestow on us. Mary our Immaculate Mother shows us how through her faith and love.

During Advent, we prepare for the joyful coming of our Savior—the birth of Jesus Christ. Let us also reflect on Our Lady’s faith—Mary’s “yes” to God’s call—which brought forth this great joy into the world. Like Mary, let us rejoice in God our Savior and may our souls magnify the Lord!

And when we gather around the Christmas tree to give presents to one another, let us be grateful for the greatest gift of all—the birth of Jesus Christ—God’s gift of love and mercy—given to us through Mary. Let us give thanks for all of God’s goodness and let us pray for Christ to be born in each of our hearts so that we may live as God wants us to live.

Like Mary, we can bring Christ into the world by living, loving, and sharing our faith in God. During this joyous time of year, let us cherish the gift of God’s love and unite our hearts with the Immaculate Heart of Mary who will unite us with her Son for our eternal salvation. Let us continue our Journey.

Way of Life

When Our Lady said to the angel Gabriel, “May it be done to me according to your word,” [Luke 1:38] Mary accepted a whole way of life. We are asked to do the same—to live according to God’s way of life.

When we say yes to God, we keep the hope of salvation alive. Faith, love, mercy, compassion—these are the gifts that God gives to us. These are the gifts that we are called to share in our daily living. Are we listening to this call?

During this time of year, we can be distracted with shopping for presents, traveling out of town, and going to parties; perhaps we lose sight of the spiritual preparation and celebration meant for our souls. This is the season to open our hearts and allow Jesus to form within us.

With the conception and birth of Jesus, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” [John 1:14]. Does the Word still dwell among us? Or perhaps, the Word has faded and holds less meaning in our lives because we see choosing God’s way of life as more difficult than choosing our own way.

From the moment Christ was conceived, we can see through Mary’s life that the journey toward salvation is not an easy one. The roads Mary traveled were not paved with convenience, but Our Lady did not complain because she put her life in God’s hands. Faith was her strength and companion. How often do we put our life in God’s hands, only to snatch it back when the road gets tough? (See story, pg. 2) >

(Way of Life, cont'd from pg. 1)

Mary never held back. Mary knew what she endured in her lifetime was for God's sake. When we accept God's way and live life for God's sake, our lives and our daily activities take on a whole new meaning and deeper purpose than if we live only for ourselves. Whatever challenges we face are less burdensome when we offer up to God all that we do. Before we can offer up what we do, we need to offer up ourselves—not with a half-hearted gesture, but with a fully open heart.

Mary's heart was always fully open and there was no hesitancy on Mary's part when she said "I am the handmaid of the Lord" [Luke 1:38]. Mary was full of grace and the Lord was with her every day of her human existence and remains with her for all eternity in Heaven.

The same promise holds true for us. With our hearts open, our souls can receive God's graces and be filled with God's love, assuring us of His presence every day of our human existence and beyond. However, we lose our grasp of God's promise when we hesitate in answering His call. Hesitation creates barriers and obstacles in our spiritual journey, preventing us from truly living according to God's Word and His way.

By letting God enter into our hearts, we can partake in spreading the peace, joy, and good will that our Lord wants all of us to have. Let us use this time of year to open our hearts and to prepare our souls so that we can say yes whenever God calls. Let there be no hesitation on our part or as the angel said to Mary: "Do not be afraid" [Luke 1:30]. Our Blessed Mother will guide us, giving us the strength and companionship we need on our spiritual journey. During this joyous time of year, may the Holy Spirit come upon us and may the power of the Most High overshadow us so that God's Word will continue to dwell among us.#

Prayer

*Heavenly Mother,
With your
Immaculate Conception,
You are our model of
holiness.
Where once
the Garden of Eden
was taken from us;
with your yes
to God,
eternal life in Paradise
is once again
in our sight.
Sin takes away
our hope, but
You, who were born
without sin,
give us hope.
Indeed, you are
the Mother of Hope.
May your way,
which is God's Way,
be our way of life.
Amen.*

Embrace Jesus

God could have chosen any way to carry out His will on earth; He chose the most unintimidating way to bring us the hope of salvation. Through Mary, God gave us His Son and through this humble handmaid, we are introduced to Jesus.

"You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall name Him Jesus," the angel Gabriel said to Mary [Luke 1:31]. From that moment and the events that followed, we learn what it means to embrace Jesus.

With Mary, we see that embracing Jesus means opening our hearts and allowing Him to live within us and through us. With Joseph, embracing Jesus means bringing Him into our family life and daily living. Jesus is our family and we are His family.

With cousin Elizabeth, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and Anna, our embrace means beholding Jesus as our Savior and adoring Him as He should be adored. At the visitation, Elizabeth could not see Jesus, but she knew her Savior was near. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb," Elizabeth said to Mary [Luke 1:42].

The first coming of Christ into this world could have been in a blaze of glory, but that would have made it impossible to approach Him, to be close to Him, and to embrace Him. Instead He came as we all do and what's more, He came in the most humble way possible—born in a stable with a manger for His bed.

The message is clear to us: Be Not Afraid. If we were meant to be intimidated, would the shepherds have been sent to behold their Savior—a newborn infant lying in a manger? Would the Magi have traveled miles to pay homage to a baby? Would Simeon have held Jesus in his arms? God wants all in search of salvation to find and embrace Jesus. He has given us Mary to embrace us and help us draw close to her Son so that we may experience the joy of being united with our loving Savior. #

Time for Joy

Let's face it, 2016 has been a rough year! What's more, those daily aggravations like traffic, crowded stores, and cranky customers tend to get worse around this time. Almost makes you want to say "Bah, hum-bug!" Of course, we cannot let the Scrooge in us have the final word.

The fact is we have reasons to be joyful. Despite attempts to secularize Christmas, this holy time is and always will be about the celebration of Christ's birth. Let's take a moment to contemplate the angel's message to the shepherds: "I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people...a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" [Luke 2:10-11]. Truly an event to celebrate!

Once, the doors of paradise had been closed to us due to the sin of man, but the Son of Man, born in humility, changed all of that. "Knock and the door will be opened to you" [Matthew 7:7]. We lose sight of this great gift when we let the busyness of the season overshadow the true meaning of Christmas. Certainly, there is a greater purpose to this time of year than snagging the best bargain or scoring career points at the annual office party. Christmas is the time to welcome Jesus into our hearts and have Him grow within us so when the day comes, we will be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Yes, this time of year can be downright sad and lonely, especially for those who are in poor health, or have lost their jobs, or worse, have lost loved ones. We are not always ready for life's changes which is all the more reason to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Like our stay on this earth, the pleasures we get from the gifts and gadgets we exchange with one another are temporary. The gift that is everlasting is God's love for each and every one of us. May we always be grateful to God our Father and Mary our Mother for bringing Jesus into our world so that one day we may celebrate Christmas in Heaven. May God bless us, everyone! #

The Gift of Giving

During this time of year as we make out our Christmas list of gifts that we plan to give to one another, what gift do we plan to give to God?

How often have we thought of asking "Lord, what do You want for Christmas?" Perhaps, a more specific question should be: "God, what do You want of me?" Do we really want to know the answer?

Of course, we can say that God wants us to open our hearts to Him and to do His will. Mary, our Blessed Mother, set a beautiful example when she said "May it be done to me according to your word" [Luke 1:38]. Are we truly willing to do the same or do we fear that if we give our hearts fully to God, our lives will change forever?

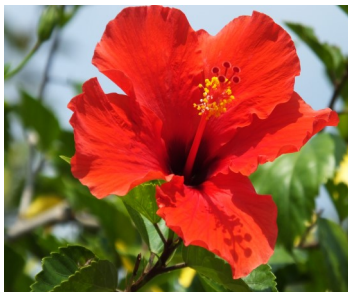
Renewing our commitment to God is certainly a gift worth giving because when we renew our commitment to the Almighty, we commit ourselves to the loving and merciful care of humanity. When Mary said yes to God, Our Lady also said yes to us. By giving herself to God, Mary gave herself to us and for our salvation, Mary made it possible for Christ to walk the earth and live among us.

When we give ourselves to God and commit ourselves to His way, like Mary, we open the door to all that is good. Such goodness is manifested in the way we treat one another, in the way we work, and in the way we take care of ourselves and our families.

Life takes on a whole new meaning when we open our hearts and allow

Christ to live and work through us. Good works replace sinful acts, selflessness overpowers selfishness, and hope is given to the hopeless. These are the gifts worth giving and that last forever.

May we look to Mary as our role model during this season of giving, and may Our Blessed Mother help us give the gift that will be most pleasing to God our Father in Heaven. #



Prayer

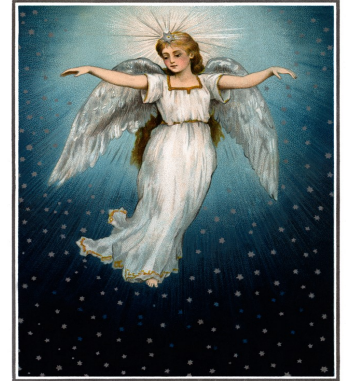
*Holy Mother,
You gave birth
to the
Son of God
for our salvation.
Help us to be forever
grateful
for this incredible
gift of joy.
The roads we travel
in this world
do not always
lead to happiness.
Help us, dear Lady,
to cherish
God's love for us
as we celebrate
the coming of your Son
Jesus Christ
and
please guide us
on the road
that leads to
the
Kingdom of Heaven.
Amen.*

Dear Angel,

Christmas is here again! How quickly time passes and so much still needs to be done—the shopping, the wrapping, the cooking, the stressing! Of course, that is not what God intended for this time of year.

Help us, dear Angel, to keep our minds and hearts focused on God's gift of salvation, wrapped in mercy and adorned with faith, hope, and love. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, help us to remember the sacredness of human life.

God gave us a new beginning with the coming of Jesus Christ; a beginning that was only made possible when Mary said yes. May we always have the faith and the courage to say yes to keep the hope of salvation alive. #



The Gift

As we gather around the Christmas tree
with presents piled on the floor,
there is an expectation that will be—
a wanting for something more.
What are we looking for under the tree?
Among the gifts and wrappings,
what do we expect to see?
It's a certain something we won't find
tucked in a box or in wrappings all entwined.
Not tied with ribbons or fancy bows,
but it's a gift worth giving, Heaven knows.
Yes, what we seek comes from above;
Our Lord's Heavenly graces
wrapped with mercy and with love.
God's good graces are ours to be;
ready to fill our souls
for our salvation and eternity.
This gift was made possible as we know
because of a miracle
born so long ago.
A humble handmaid, all meek and mild,
said yes to the Archangel to carry God's child.
A loving mother to this Son
whose life was given for everyone.
So let us accept God's gift with our hearts open wide
and may we live a life more holy
with Mary as our guide.

Journey to Our Lady

is published five times a year to help readers develop a closer relationship to Mary our Blessed Mother.

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