

*A*DVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
*W*ISDOM
—— *from* ——
SAINT
ALPHONSUS
LIGUORI

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ADVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
WISDOM
— *from* —
SAINT ALPHONSUS
LIGUORI

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Saint Alphonsus Liguori's Own Words

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Compiled by Maurice J. Nutt, CSsR



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Introduction

It has been said that when one reads the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, it is as though a person is listening in on a very intimate conversation between Saint Alphonsus and the saints. A very holy man himself, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, in his characteristic self-effacing humility, almost always defers to the wisdom and sanctity of other holy men and women of the Church.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori is credited with writing over one hundred books. This prolific writer entertained subjects from prayer to preaching, from the Blessed Virgin Mary to moral theology, from the practice of the love of Jesus Christ to the preparation for death, and from the duties and dignity of the priesthood to the responsibilities of vowed religious. While his vast and expansive literary career covered many themes and topics, a few were constant. He was endeared to the Incarnation, the Passion, the Eucharist, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Besides being an ardent devotee to Mary, his spirituality was grounded in the “crib, cross, and Sacrament.”

Appreciating Saint Alphonsus Liguori is an acquired taste, for he was not a man of apparitions or flamboyant religiosity. While in many ways a brilliant man—possessing a genius intellect and a connoisseur of culture, music, and art—he was an ordinary man who understood deeply the phenomenal love of God for all humanity. It was the presence of this love in his life that allowed him

to realize that every person mattered—they mattered to God, and they mattered to him.

His incessant desire to love Jesus above all things urged Alphonsus to ponder in his writings, preaching, and music the unfathomable doctrine of the Incarnation. How could God love us so much that he would send his only-begotten Son into our world as a small infant? And as if that wasn't enough, Alphonsus marveled at God's entering as a babe born in the midst of a filthy, smelly animal stable. Saint Alphonsus often decried the fact that God loved us so much that he allowed his Son to be born for our salvation in subhuman conditions, and yet the world neglected, rejected, and ultimately crucified him.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori often lamented that God loved us too much and we loved God too little. Yet Alphonsus was convinced that anyone who looked upon a Nativity scene at Christmastime and gazed upon the face of the Infant Jesus would see love incarnate and come to know and love God.

In addition to his insistence that all would come to love God through contemplation on the Babe of Bethlehem, Saint Alphonsus Liguori sought to bring the Good News of the Incarnation in song. This method of catechizing and evangelizing through song was especially effective among the unlearned and the poor. He would either use common melodies of his time and Neapolitan culture or create original songs and music that were both moving and memorable. The most famous and widely celebrated Christmas carol in Italy even today is “*Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle, O Re del Cielo*” (“You Came Down From the Stars, O King of Heaven”), composed by Saint Alphonsus Liguori in 1755 while staying at the Convent of

the Consolation, one of the Redemptorist houses in the small city of Deliceto, in southeastern Italy. While Saint Alphonsus Liguori certainly sings of the Christmas mystery, his ultimate intent was to invite Christians to enter into that mystery. The renowned composer Giuseppe Verdi once commented, “Without this song by Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Christmas isn’t Christmas.”

Alphonsus Mary Anthony John Francis Cosmas Damian Michael Gaspar de’ Liguori was born the eldest of eight children in his father’s country house at Marianella, near Naples, on September 27, 1696. The choice of many names is easily explained. Alphonsus was a traditional Liguori family name, while Cosmas, Damian, and the Archangel Michael were the liturgical patrons of the days of his birth and baptism; Mary was reflective of his mother’s love of the Blessed Virgin, Anthony and Francis were from his mother’s devotion to these saints and her education by the Franciscan nuns.

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At the age of sixteen, Alphonsus received a double doctorate in both civil and church law from the University of Naples. He practiced law before the courts of Naples for several years. Undoubtedly the youngest lawyer in the Neapolitan Bar, he was a successful and popular attorney who was noted never to have lost a case. However, in 1723 Alphonsus argued a case that would ultimately be his last. God’s will for Alphonsus was to become a priest. Alphonsus left his law profession and spent days in prayer, seeking to know God’s will.

On December 21, 1726, at the age of thirty, Alphonsus was ordained to the priesthood. For six years he labored in and around Naples, giving missions, ministering to the incurables, visiting prisoners, and preaching to the poor street people. He trained lay catechists who would then work in the slums, and he himself went

into the slums to address the spiritual abandonment he found there. It was this initial encounter with the abandoned poor that God used to call Alphonsus to his lifework.

In 1732, Alphonsus Liguori founded a religious congregation in the mountain region of Scala, near Amalfi. He and his companions preached to the poor goatherds who were spiritually abandoned. This little band of missionaries grew to be the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, known the world over as the Redemptorists.

Today this humble man who deeply loved the Infant Jesus is recognized as a doctor of the Church and the patron saint of confessors, moral theologians, and those suffering from arthritis. Saint Alphonsus Liguori's life could be summed up as one of Advent waiting. He never sought to get ahead of God's will but was content with waiting. Saint Alphonsus' waiting was not idle waiting but expectant waiting. He believed God's revelations were true and to be trusted. As you journey with Saint Alphonsus Liguori throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons, may you come to love the Babe of Bethlehem and make a suitable dwelling place for him in your heart.



How to Use This Book

Advent—that period of great anticipatory joy—is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ’s arrival in Bethlehem as a helpless infant. In the Western liturgy, Advent begins four Sundays prior to December 25—the Sunday closest to November 30, which is the feast of Saint Andrew, one of Jesus’ first disciples.

The annual commemoration of Christ’s birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle that runs from Christmas day to the Baptism of the Lord. In keeping with the unfolding of the message of the liturgical year, this book is designed to be used from the first Sunday of Advent through twelve days of the Christmas cycle, or until January 6.

The four weeks of Advent are often thought of as symbolizing the four different ways Christ comes into the world: (1) upon his birth as a helpless infant; (2) upon his arrival in the hearts of believers; (3) upon his death; and (4) upon his arrival on Judgment Day.

Because Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, the fourth week of Advent is never really finished; it is abruptly, joyously, and solemnly abrogated by the annual coming again of Christ at Christmas. Christ’s Second Coming will also one day abruptly interrupt our sojourn here on Earth.

Since the calendar dictates the number of days in Advent, this book includes Scripture quotations and meditative excerpts from

the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori for twenty-eight days. These daily readings make up Part I; on Christmas day the book switches to Part II, which contains materials for twelve days of the Christmas season. If Part I contains any “extra” entries, these may be read by doubling up on days or by reading two entries on weekends. Or one may just skip those entries that do not fit within the Advent time frame of a particular year.

Each “day” in this book begins with the words of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Following that quotation is an excerpt from Scripture that is related in some way. Next is a prayer, also built on the ideas from the two preceding passages. Finally, an Advent or Christmas “action” suggests ways in which to apply the messages to one’s daily life.

Part III proposes two optional formats for using each day as part of a longer liturgical observance similar to Night Prayer, combined with a version of the Office of Readings. These options are for those who may wish to use this book as part of a more developed individual or group observance. The purpose of these readings is to enrich the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season of the liturgical year and set up a means by which individuals, families, or groups can observe the true meaning of the season.

PART I



READINGS *for*
ADVENT

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The Redeeming Plan

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Consider how God allowed 4,000 years to pass after the sin of Adam before he sent his Son on earth to redeem the world. And in the meantime, what fatal darkness reigned on the earth! The true God was not known or adored, except in one small corner of the world. Idolatry reigned everywhere; devils and beasts and stones were adored as gods....If Jesus Christ had come into the world immediately after the Fall of Adam, the greatness of this favor would have been but slightly appreciated. Let us, therefore, thank the goodness of God for having sent us into the world after the great work of redemption was accomplished.

THE INCARNATION, BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST

SCRIPTURE

The days are coming—oracle of the LORD—when I will fulfill the promise made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days, at that time, I will make a just shoot spring up for David; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; this is the name they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”

JEREMIAH 33:14–16

PRAYER

Creator and creating God, you give me such a delightful and wholesome gift in a new beginning. Pride, rebellion, and temptation called to me, and I pulled away from you. These identical issues continue to cause sin in the lives of your people. Rather than true confession, like the first Adam, I seek to blame others for the troubles in my life. Forgive me of my sins. Allow me to begin this Advent sojourn by restoring me to a fresh start and new beginning with and in you. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Whatever is at the center of your life will be the source of your security, peace, wisdom, and power. Decide today to make Jesus the center and source of everything in your life.





Fullness of Grace

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*B*ehold the happy time is come which was called the designated time: “When the designated time had come, God sent his Son...to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it” (Gal 4:4). It is called the fullness of time because of the fullness of grace which the Son of God came to communicate to [us] by the redemption of the world.

THE INCARNATION, BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST



SCRIPTURE

Brothers [and sisters]: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to 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. [Amen.]

Finally, brothers [and sisters], we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:12—4:2

PRAYER

Lord, it is my hope that I may always be in “your will and way.” Sometimes I am selfish with my time and my own desires. Today, help me sort out things in my life. I need to make you the first priority in my life and not the things that really do not matter. Assist me in conducting myself in ways that are most pleasing to you. Lord, it is my desire to live more for you this day. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Advent is a time to practice patience. Today, be patient with yourself and those around you. Spiritual growth is tender; it’s holy ground. There’s simply no greater investment.



No Doubt About God's Love

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*P*rior to the Incarnation of Jesus we might have doubted whether God loved us so much. But after the birth, life, and death of Jesus, how can we have any doubt whatsoever that God loves us with the most tender love? What greater love could God show us than to sacrifice his divine Son for love of us?

PREPARATION FOR DEATH

SCRIPTURE

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into



the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.

1 JOHN 4:7–12

PRAYER

Good and gracious God, I sincerely thank and praise you for loving me. Your love is the joy of my life. Lord, help me to love you and others totally. Take away any malice or bitterness in my life. Help me love as your Son, Jesus, loved. I resolve to bless and pray for those who persecute me—who are cruel in their attitude toward me. I bless them and do not curse them. Therefore, allow love and kindness to shine forth in my life. Let others witness the love of Christ in my life in all I say and do. Lord, be glorified in my life today. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Without involvement, there is no real commitment. Today, resolve to become involved and committed to something or someone in need of your time, your talents, or your presence.





Mary's "Yes"

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*P*icture the angel who is sent as ambassador into the town of Nazareth to announce to the Virgin Mary the coming of the Word who desires to become incarnate in her womb. The angel salutes her, calls her full of grace and blessed among women. The humble Virgin, chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, is troubled at these praises because of her great humility. But the angel encourages her, and tells her that she has found grace with God, the grace which brought peace between God and [humanity] and the reparation of the ruin caused by sin. He then tells her that she must give her Son the name of Savior—"You shall give him the name Jesus"—and that this, her Son, is the very Son of God who is to redeem the world and thus to reign over the hearts of [all].

THE INCARNATION, BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST



SCRIPTURE

In the sixth month, 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. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1:26–38

PRAYER

Loving God, as the Word made flesh, your Son, Jesus, came to an unprepared people in an unprepared place. In this Advent time and space, I realize just how unprepared I am to welcome your darling Son. Lord, instill in me a spirit of urgency to “get ready,” to stop making excuses, to stop “messaging around,” to make my life ready and acceptable to the Lord. Prepare my soul to welcome my most precious Soul Mate. Order my steps in your Word so that all you have prepared for me may be done according to your Word. Blessed Mother, I seek your intercession. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Today, take some time to note some of your good qualities. Write down these qualities and meditate on them throughout the day. Like Mary, trust and praise God for the Holy Spirit’s “overshadowing” your life.





The Word Is God

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*T*he eternal Word descends on earth to save [humanity]; and from where does he descend? “At one end of the heavens it comes forth” (Ps 19:7). He descends from the bosom of his divine Father, where from eternity he was begotten in the brightness of sanctity. And where does he descend? He descends into the womb of a Virgin, a child of Adam, which in comparison with the bosom of God is an object of horror. Therefore, the Church sings, “You did not abhor the Virgin’s womb.” Yes, because the Word is God, he is immense, omnipotent, most blessed, and supreme Lord, and equal in everything to the Father.

THE INCARNATION, BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST

SCRIPTURE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1–5

PRAYER

O God, your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path. Guide my feet, Lord, lest I stumble on my Advent journey. May I be encouraged to study your Word, believe your Word, and follow your Word as I strive to grow closer to you and your holy Word. Enable me to speak and share your Word so your Word will indeed go forth and do the work it is purposed to do and not return to me void. Let your Word become a part of me so that I may be a worthy Word-bearer and Word-sharer to all I meet this day. Use me to light a darkened path in the world today. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Today, set aside one hour to study sacred Scripture. Perhaps you may want to study more in-depth the Scripture citation for today or some other Scripture text. Seek God deeply today in the study of God's Word. How is God's Word speaking to you within the context of your life's circumstances?

