

## Saturday 31 December

Scripture: 1 John 2: 18-21; Psalm 95; John 1:1-18

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

We come to the end of 2016 and prepare to begin a New Year. The Earth reaches the same point in its orbit as on the eve of this year – but it is a different world. People have died and been born. Decisions have been taken – qualifications gained – new jobs begun and old jobs ended. Many changes affecting everyone's daily lives. And the astonishing thing is that the Word of God – there before the creation of the Earth – chooses to come and live among us. The world with its everyday concerns can never be the same since the Son of God graced the air by breathing it – the water by drinking it and sailing on it – and the earth by walking upon it.

- What has changed in your life since this time last year?
- What has changed in the world?

If you can, give time to a reflection back over 2016 – counting its blessings and acknowledging the pains and disappointments. In whatever way feels right to you, try to lay down the things that are best left behind. And find a way to thank God for the good things that have come your way. Finally, pray for the year ahead – that you will receive whatever it offers to you with open hands and heart.



# Daily Reflections



Week Beginning Sunday 25 December 2016  
to  
Saturday 31 December 2016  
Christmas Octave

## Sunday 25 December – Christmas Day

Scripture: Isaiah 52: 7-10; Psalm 97; Hebrews 1: 1-6; John 1: 1-18

*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Yesterday we reflected on the coming of Christ into the world as light – a theme taken up by John in today's gospel. John had very long life and had plenty of time to ponder and think about the meaning of Jesus' life. He himself suffered very dark times of exile and persecution but he never lost sight of the light that Jesus had kindled in his heart. He knew that it takes just a small light to overcome the deepest darkness.

- When have you experienced a small light that has overcome the darkness?
- Who needs such a light today?

At some point during the day, try to find space to be still. Again, you might like to spend some time in the dark. Light a candle and notice how it changes things and how your eye is drawn to the flame. Pray for those in darkness today – perhaps focusing on those who are lonely and far from home and family.



## Friday 30 December – The Holy Family

Scripture: Ecclesiasticus 3: 2-6, 12-14; Psalm 127; Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23

*When Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'*

We do not actually know where Joseph's home was. Many people guess that he was also from Nazareth but this passage suggests that his home was further south – quite possibly closer to Bethlehem. When he agreed to marry Mary he could not have imagined having to flee for the child's life. Nor, if his home had been in Judea, could he have expected to have to settle in a new place and set his family up there. They would have been close to Mary's family who Luke tells us lived there – but this was a new start for Joseph and his little family

- How does Joseph's story echo those of fathers making similar decisions today?
- When is it helpful for families to have a new start in a new place?

Pray today for families – particularly those uprooted from their homes by violence and forced to rebuild their lives among strangers.



## Thursday 29 December – St Thomas Becket

Scripture: Colossians 1: 24-29; Psalm 22; Matthew 10: 28-33

*Jesus said, 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.'*

Thomas Becket knew that his life was in danger. He knew that he had to stand up to the king – and what that might lead to. He was probably afraid – only a foolish person would not be. But he sensed that this was what he was called to do and, though threatened by those who were to kill him, continued on to Vespers with his brother-monks. Interestingly, his murderers and Henry II who was responsible for saying something which led to the murder all repented and found forgiveness. Another, later king, Henry saw the cult of Thomas as too close for comfort. He had Thomas' shrine destroyed and tried to suppress his name and reputation as a courageous man willing to defy a king and be martyred for his cause.

- Who stands up to kings and politicians in the cause of right and justice in our own day?
- What does Thomas' life and death tell us about the need sometimes to challenge those in power?

You might like to turn to St Thomas Beckett and ask his intercession for those in power – and those who must challenge them in the name of justice and truth.



## Monday 26 December – Boxing Day/Feast of St Stephen

Scripture: Acts 6: 8-10; Psalm 30; Matthew 10: 17-22

*Jesus said, 'Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.'*

Jesus does not specify who “they” are – the passage immediately before this one simply speaks of the “wolves” among whom he is sending his disciples. He is aware that speaking on his behalf will not always be welcome – too many people have vested interests. Jesus sees this treatment as a testimony – or a witness – to the truth. It did not take long for people like Stephen to discover the reality of Jesus' words as they were forced to witness to their faith through suffering and death. The word martyr originally meant “witness” – someone who was prepared to offer their life as testimony to their faith that Jesus has the promise of a life much greater than the one they were losing.

- What is the difference between a martyr who gives their own life for their faith and those who kill others and claim martyrdom?
- What do you make of this feast coming so close to Christmas Day?

Pray today for the people of faith all around the world who are suffering in all kinds of way for what they believe. Think particularly of Christians forced from their homes and being killed because of their faith in Jesus.

You might also like to pray for deacons and altar servers who celebrate this feast of one of the first people called to serve in charity and at the altar.

## Tuesday 27 December – Feast of St John the Evangelist

Scripture: 1 John 1: 1-4; Psalm 96; John 20: 2-8

*Peter saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.*

It seems a small detail that John should get to the tomb first but did not go in, waiting for Simon Peter to catch up. John was probably younger and maybe more active but defers to the older man. Another difference between them is that John stayed faithful to Jesus until the bitter end and, only a couple of days before, had helped to place his body in that tomb. He has looked in and seen the grave clothes and may have begun to guess at what might have happened but it is when he finally enters the tomb and sees those blood-stained grave clothes left behind that he dares to believe that Jesus has done what he promised and risen from the dead.

- Why do you think that the people who put our Lectionary together chose this Reading – out of all the ones they could have chosen about John – for today's feast?
- Which Feast do you feel is more important – Christmas or Easter? And why?

Reflect today on John the Apostle – John the Evangelist. You might like to skim through his gospel and see what springs out for you. Stay with it and pray for guidance and wisdom as you pray with the words of someone who knew Jesus extremely well and who was one of the first people to witness the Resurrection.



## Wednesday 28 December – The Holy Innocents

Scripture: 1 John 1:5-2:2; Psalm 123; Matthew 2: 13-18

*When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.*

Herod was a man with great power but this action shows the cruelty such men can be capable of. He is not using his power to protect his people but uses it to order men to kill children. Not only does he corrupt his own soul but he corrupts those of others by making them murderers of innocents. Such people still live in our world – those who kill children and other vulnerable people and those who teach others to target them in bombing and other attacks. The world stands in horror – but wonders what can be done in the face of such evil.

- Where are men of power still targeting the weak and vulnerable – and ordering others to do the same?
- What can we do in the face of all of this?

Browse the internet or your daily paper and look for examples of great abuse of power – particularly involving children. Choose just one and pray particularly for that. If an idea comes to mind as to something you might do work out how you might carry it through.

