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The Holy Father's Prayer Intentions For This Month

General Intention:

That all peoples may grow in harmony and peace through mutual understanding and respect.

Mission Intention:

That children and young people may be messengers of the Gospel and that they may be respected and preserved from all violence and exploitation.

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Disciple

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Breaking Open the Word—Notes on the Sunday Gospels

Dec. 4 (Mk. 1:1-8)

In today's Gospel we hear about John the Baptist in the wilderness calling the people to repentance. His appearance is striking—he wears a garment made of camel hair and eats locust. The wearing of animal skins was characteristic of many OT prophets (Zech. 13:4) and his appearance—along with his presence by the Jordan River—would have reminded people of the prophet Elijah, who, it was believed, would return before the Messiah appeared. The eating of locusts was allowed by the Torah (one of the few insects to make the list) and shows that John is both faithful to God and living an ascetic lifestyle.

Dec. 11 (Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28)

In today's Gospel we see that there were many people who

believed that perhaps John the Baptist was the Messiah. For his part, John repeatedly denies that he is the Messiah. When pressed about who he is he quotes Isaiah 40:3: "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

Dec. 18 (Lk. 1:26-38)

Today's Gospel is also the reading for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Commenting on it one famous theologian said, "The virgin, betrothed to the man from the house of David, is chosen by God to be His incomparable temple. God's Son, brought by the Spirit to her womb, will make His home in her, and her entire existence will serve His development into a complete man. Here too God's work does not first begin with the moment of annunciation,

rather, with the first moment of Mary's existence. With her Immaculate Conception God begins to work on His temple; only because He makes her capable of saying an unconditional Yes to Him can He move into her house and assure her, like David, that this house will last forever in her Son."

Dec. 25 (Jn. 1:1-18)

Today's Gospel is taken from the prologue of St. John. These verses introduce "the main themes of the Gospel to be developed in subsequent chapters: light (1:4), life (1:4), darkness (1:5), testimony (1:7), faith (1:12), glory (1:14), truth (1:17). This network of images and ideas is held together around Jesus the Word, who is portrayed as the Creator and Redeemer of all things."

Faith Foundations—Basics of Catholic Christian Belief

The Incarnation

(From the Compendium of the
Catechism of the Catholic Church)

The following is a brief overview of Catholic belief about the Incarnation.

Why did the Son of God become man?

For us men and for our salvation, the Son of God became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. He did so to reconcile us sinners with God, to have us learn of God's infinite love, to be our model of holiness and to

make us "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

What does the word

"Incarnation" mean?

The Church calls the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one divine Person of the Word the "Incarnation". To bring about our salvation the Son of God was made "flesh" (John 1:14) and became truly man. Faith in the Incarnation is a distinctive sign of the Christian faith.

In what way is Jesus Christ true God and true man?

Jesus is inseparably true God and true man in the unity of his divine Person. As the Son of God, who is "begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father," he was made true man, our brother, without ceasing to be God, our Lord.

How does the Church set forth the Mystery of the Incarnation?

The Church confesses that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature, not

(continued on next page)

Faith Foundations...Continued

confused with each other but united in the Person of the Word. Therefore, in the humanity of Jesus all things - his miracles, his suffering, and his death - must be attributed to his divine Person which acts by means of his assumed human nature.

Did the incarnate Son of God have a soul with human knowledge?

The Son of God assumed a body animated by a rational human soul. With his human intellect Jesus learned many things by way of experience; but also as man the Son of God had an intimate and immediate

knowledge of God his Father. He likewise understood people's secret thoughts and he knew fully the eternal plans which he had come to reveal.

How did the two wills of the incarnate Word cooperate?

Jesus had a divine will and a human will. In his earthly life the Son of God humanly willed all that he had divinely decided with the Father and the Holy Spirit for our salvation. The human will of Christ followed without opposition or reluctance the divine will or, in other words, it was subject to it.

Did Christ have a true human body?

Christ assumed a true human body by means of which the invisible God became visible. This is the reason why Christ can be represented and venerated in sacred images.

What is the meaning of the expression "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit...?"

This expression means that the Virgin Mary conceived the eternal Son in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit without the cooperation of a man. The angel told her at the Annunciation that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Luke 1:35).



"For us men and for our salvation, the Son of God became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin

Faith and Media—Reading and Viewing Recommendations

Book of the Month:

Letters to a Young Catholic by George Weigel

This book would make a great gift for someone in your life who is curious about Catholicism or lukewarm in their faith. I happened to pick up this book to read during a road trip and was surprised by how much I enjoyed it. By its title I assumed that it was for teens, but in reality it is for anyone looking to deepen their faith. Weigel's approach is similar to

sending postcards to loved ones, with a "trip" to various Catholic landmarks leading into wonderfully written reflections on a particular aspect of Catholicism.

Film of the Month:

Into Great Silence

A rare, privileged glimpse into the daily life of the Carthusian monks of the Grand Chartreuse monastery in France. Taped without any artificial lighting or sound over the

course of six months, the film has a quiet (literally) grace to it. The pace of the documentary is slow and methodic, which may not be for everyone, but the mixture of devotion and simplicity of life which it captures will stick with you. An interview with one of the monks who is blind is particularly touching. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle of the holiday season a film of this nature can be great way to enter into the spirit of Advent.



Left: Letters to a Young Catholic (Basic)

Right: Into Great Silence (Zeitgeist Films)

An Advent Reflection by Pope Benedict XVI

"A...basic element of Advent is waiting—a waiting that is an act of hope. Advent thus shows us the very essence of Christian time and the true nature of history....

When the time is not filled with meaningful presence, waiting becomes unbearable. When the present moment remains completely empty—when all we can do is to look for something to come, and there is nothing at all in the

here and now—every second is too long. And waiting is an intolerable burden when it remains completely uncertain whether we actually dare expect anything.

But when time itself is meaningful and each moment contains something valuable of its own, the joyful anticipation of something greater, something still to come, makes even more precious that which we already experience. And it gives us a

kind of invisible force that bears us across the individual moments. The Christian Advent wants to help us attain this kind of waiting, for this is the truly Christian form of waiting and hoping.

This is because the gifts of Jesus Christ do not belong purely to the future: they penetrate the present time too."

~Pope Benedict XVI

The Blessing of Christmas



"Come, let us adore Him."