

ADVENT

2017

EXPECTANTLY
waiting in
wonder

DAILY
REFLECTIONS WITH THE MESSAGE

EXPECTANTLY WAITING IN WONDER

Daily Reflections with *The Message*

by Timothy and Rakhi McCormick

Copyright © 2017 by ACTA Publications

Cover design and illustrations by Rakhi McCormick

Text design and typesetting by Patricia A. Lynch

Published by ACTA Publications, 4848 N. Clark St.,
Chicago, IL 60640, (800) 397-2282, actapublications.com

Scripture taken from *The Message: Catholic Ecumenical Edition* Copyright © 2013
by Eugene H. Peterson all rights reserved. Licensed with permission of NavPress. Represented by
Tyndale House Publishers Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois 60188.

The Message and *The Message* logo are registered trademarks of NavPress.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, digital, or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, including the Internet, without permission from the publisher. Permission is hereby given to use short excerpts with proper citation in reviews and marketing copy, newsletters, bulletins, class handouts, and scholarly papers.

ISBN: 978-0-87946-593-3

Printed in the United States of America by Total Printing Systems

Year 25 24 23 22 2120 19 18 1

Printing 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 First

 Text printed on 30% post-consumer recycled paper

EXPECTANTLY WAITING IN WONDER

The day-to-day responsibilities and demands that most of us experience, no matter what our station in life may be, can dull our senses to all the miracles, both big and small, that occur each day. In this season of Advent, we are called to rekindle that child-like wonder as we wait to celebrate the birth of our savior and eagerly watch for his return. Our waiting is not marked by passive inaction, but by active preparation. Through excerpts from the daily Mass readings, reflections, illustrations, and suggestions for action, each day provides an invitation to enter into the wondrous love of a God who chose to become one of us. So open up your heart as you pray these daily reflections and expectantly wait for God to reveal his wonders in your life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Many people find their prayer time more fruitful if they set aside time at the same place each day. Perhaps you'll want to reflect on the day's reading before getting out of bed in the morning, over your morning cup of coffee, on your daily commute, before class, or before retiring for the night. Make a commitment to find a time and place that works for you, even if it takes some experimentation. Consider asking a friend, family member, or fellow church member to accompany you, discussing each day's reflection together, offering support and encouragement, and holding each other accountable as you respond to God's invitation this season. If you forget or miss a day, don't get discouraged. Remember that God's invitation is always present. Simply resume your Advent journey on the next day.

THE MESSAGE[®]

The Scripture passages in this booklet come from *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*—a fresh, challenging, and faith-filled translation of the Bible from the original languages into contemporary, conversational American English. It's a Bible that talks like we do. This "paraphrasal" translation tries to reproduce the spirit of the original text rather than provide a literal translation of the words. We hope these passages will give you new insights into overly familiar texts and help you think again about what they have to say to us today. Compare *The Message* with other translations, pray with it, and let it challenge you this Advent. Visit TheMessageCatholic.com to learn more, or follow us on facebook, instagram, and Twitter at *The Message Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*.



Mark 13:37

EXPECT GOD TO SHOW UP

Every time I think of you—and I think of you often!—I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus. There’s no end to what has happened in you—it’s beyond speech, beyond knowledge. The evidence of Christ has been clearly verified in your lives. Just think—you don’t need a thing, you’ve got it all! All God’s gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale.

—1 Corinthians 1:4-7

REFLECTION

When you consider the work of God in your life, is it one of open and free access, one where there is no end to the transformation that is taking place? Or, like me, do you sometimes feel a little worn out and used up? What God is doing in us has no end! Even when we feel used up, God has given us every gift in Himself. As we begin the Advent season, rest and be restored in hope. Expect God to show up, because he has and will continue to do so, with gifts beyond your greatest Amazon Wish List!

ACTION

Create a wishlist for God. What is it you need from him in your life (and we don’t mean a 60” flat screen TV)? What needs healing and restoration? What needs invigorating energy? What just needs to be taken away?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

TROUBLING GOD

As Jesus entered the village of Capernaum, a Roman captain came up in a panic and said, “Master, my servant is sick. He can’t walk. He’s in terrible pain.”

Jesus said, “I’ll come and heal him.” “Oh, no,” said the captain. “I don’t want to put you to all that trouble. Just give the order and my servant will be fine.”...

Taken aback, Jesus said, “I’ve yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how he works.”

—Matthew 8:5-8, 10

REFLECTION

God is waiting to work wonders. Too often, we hold back, either feeling unworthy or like a burden. Jesus says to us, “I’ll come.” We say to him, “Oh, no. It’s no big deal.” Do we believe that the smallest detail to us is a big deal to God? That is the depth of his love for us. Because we often view God with human eyes, we don’t always trust that God will hear us or see our need and answer. The truth is that he is waiting for us more than we are waiting on him.

ACTION

Google an image of Christ that catches your eye. Set it as the background of your phone or computer for the day. Spend some time in contemplation—hear God tell you, “you are mine.” Reflect below on the feelings and thoughts this evokes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BLESSED ARE THE CLUELESS

At that, Jesus rejoiced, exuberant in the Holy Spirit. “I thank you, Father, Master of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the know-it-alls and showed them to these innocent newcomers. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way.

“I’ve been given it all by my Father! Only the Father knows who the Son is and only the Son knows who the Father is. The Son can introduce the Father to anyone he wants to.”

—Luke 10:21-22

REFLECTION

Do you sometimes feel like you don’t have a clue? Jesus rejoices over you! We have a human tendency to want to know everything and know it now. We place importance on degrees and certifications, for work and school. We too often identify people’s worth based on their accomplishments. Jesus is not about that. His kingdom is not based on merit, thank goodness! He comes to introduce us to the Father so that we may have life abundantly in him, but we fail to see that if we think we already know it all.

ACTION

Find your baptismal certificate. Frame it and put in a place of prominence as a reminder that you are already qualified to live a life with Christ. Reflect below on what makes you hesitate to share the good news of Christ.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BLAZINGLY ALIVE

After Jesus returned, he walked along Lake Galilee and then climbed a mountain and took his place, ready to receive visitors. They came, tons of them, bringing along the paraplegic, the blind, the maimed, the mute—all sorts of people in need—and more or less threw them down at Jesus’ feet to see what he would do with them. He healed them. When the people saw the mutes speaking, the maimed healthy, the paraplegics walking around, the blind looking around, they were astonished and let everyone know that God was blazingly alive among them.

—Matthew 15:29-31

REFLECTION

It is so easy in this age of instant communication and constantly being on the go to miss the grandeur of how God is working - or even take the time to allow him to do so. Signs and wonders are still happening in this day. We go to great lengths to seek them unaware that they are happening right here and right now, sometimes through us! As the people in Christ’s day brought the lost and broken to him, we are called to do the same. How else will people know that God is blazingly alive?

ACTION

Think of those in your life who need the healing power of God. Write their names below and commit to praying with and over them during Advent in the name of Jesus. (Remember—you are qualified for this!) A simple prayer will do—come Holy Spirit, come Lord Jesus—keep it simple!

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

PASSWORD NOT REQUIRED

“Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance—*isn’t* going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on.”

—Matthew 7:21, 24

REFLECTION

Everything today is password protected—phones, computers, homes, cars—everything. Jesus is not interested in passwords. There is no secret handshake to get into the Kingdom of God. There are no right words, only the next right action. Finding the Kingdom consists in persisting after the will of God. Fall down? No biggie! Shake it off and do the next right thing. Even when you’re not sure what that is, as Thomas Merton wrote, “I believe that the desire to please You, does in fact please you. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.”

ACTION

In your prayer today, do not rely on memorized prayers (the Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.). Speak to God as you would a friend. Ask him to reveal his will for you. Write down whatever God speaks in your heart, even if you are unsure it is him

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

THE DIVINE FINGERPRINT

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

—Ephesians 1:11-12

REFLECTION

We are drenched in messages about who we are or should be. Some are subliminal through marketing, while others are in our face expectations from those around us. None of these tell us the full truth about who we are created to be. Only Jesus can do this. God created us in his image, male and female he created us. We have a divine fingerprint as part of our DNA. Don't let anything or anyone tell you otherwise.

ACTION

Write out and/or illustrate Psalm 139:13-16 and/or Jeremiah 29:11. Put it on your mirror where you will see it daily. How does this contrast with other messages about yourself in your daily life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



GOD IN OUR BACKYARD

“Don’t begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don’t try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.”

—Matthew 10:6-8

REFLECTION

We often want to do big things for God. Take that mission trip, save the world. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta reminded us, we have to find our own Calcutta, love the broken in our midst—our families, the poor, the sick, the addicts, the refugees, the single mother, the abandoned child, the hopeless and despairing. If we all did just that, think of all the people who would come to know the healing love of God! As the other famous Saint Teresa (of Avila) happened to say, we are the hands and feet of Christ. What we have received so generously from Jesus, his love and mercy, we share with a generous spirit.

ACTION

What one demographic tugs at your heartstrings? At the beginning of this Church year, make a commitment to accompany them to the heart of Christ—not just with your pocketbook or social media status, but with your hands and feet—and heart!

.....

.....

.....

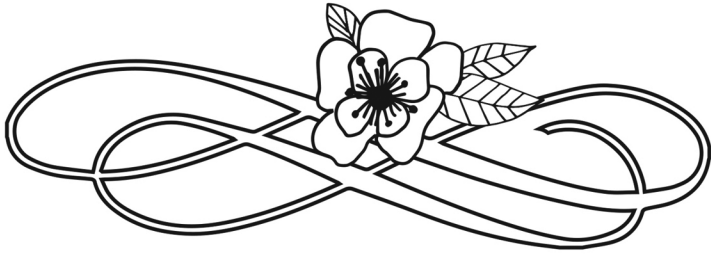
.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



COMFORT



my

people

Isaiah 40:1



CARPE DIEM

Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day—but *we'll* hardly notice. We'll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

So, my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace.

—2 Peter 3:11-14

REFLECTION

Don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today. Who's heard that before? While my procrastinating tendencies recoil at it, there is a great truth there. We are not promised tomorrow. The good news is that Jesus is with us now. Here. Today. He makes it possible for our lives to be transformed in wondrous ways right now—not later when we have time or the money—right now in his power. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and his peace and promises can be yours today, even in the greatest chaos.

ACTION

If you don't already have a crucifix displayed in a place of prominence in your home, do that today. Let it remind you that the promise, peace, and power of Christ is with you today and every day.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BE AWESTRUCK, NOT ANNOYED

Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking and said, “Why all this gossipy whispering? Which is simpler: to say ‘I forgive your sins,’ or to say ‘Get up and start walking’? Well, just so it’s clear that I’m the Son of Man and authorized to do either, or both....” He now spoke directly to the paraplegic: “Get up. Take your bedroll and go home.” Without a moment’s hesitation, he did it—got up, took his blanket, and left for home, giving glory to God all the way. The people rubbed their eyes, incredulous—and then also gave glory to God. Awestruck, they said, “We’ve never seen anything like that!”

—Luke 5:22-26

REFLECTION

When was the last time you were awestruck? We have this tendency to see great things happening in other people’s lives and become jealous. Sometimes this leads to gossipy whispering about what is wrong in their life, or how they might have attained said “good,” instead of rejoicing that something wonderful should be happening. Be awestruck at the power of God—even if it’s not in your own life right now (though his power is moving there too!). Work toward being genuinely happy for the good of another, knowing that God is wondrously working for your good as well.

ACTION

As we near the end of the calendar year, consider writing a note of encouragement to someone of whom you may have been jealous. Take that feeling of jealousy to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many parishes offer additional opportunities for the sacrament, including communal services, during Advent.

.....

.....

.....

.....

HOME OF THE SPIRIT

The doors of God’s Temple in Heaven flew open, and the Ark of his Covenant was clearly seen surrounded by flashes of lightning, loud shouts, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a fierce hailstorm.

A great Sign appeared in Heaven: a Woman dressed all in sunlight, standing on the moon, and crowned with Twelve Stars. She was giving birth to a Child and cried out in the pain of childbirth.

Revelation 11:19 – 12:2

REFLECTION

In ancient Israel the temple was the holiest site for God’s people—the holy of holies. The Ark of the Covenant was placed there and worshiped as God’s presence on Earth. Enter Mary. Through her “yes,” she became the Ark so to speak. Jesus, God made flesh, grew in her womb and entered the world in human form. Through our baptism in Christ, we are now “a sacred place, a place of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Remember that the next time you are cut off in traffic!

ACTION

When you consider that your body is a sacred place, a home for the Holy Spirit, are there things you would change about how you treat yourself or others? Is the Christ in you visible, or do you need a small makeover? Place an image of the Holy Spirit on your mirror to challenge yourself to let the God be visible through you today.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



NOTHING

you see is

IMPOSSIBLE

with

GOD

luke 1:37



BOOST YOUR ENERGY

Why would you ever complain, O Jacob,
or, whine, Israel, saying,

“GOD has lost track of me.

He doesn’t care what happens to me”?

God doesn’t come and go. God *lasts*.

He’s Creator of all you can see or imagine.

He doesn’t get tired out, doesn’t pause to catch his breath.

And he knows *everything*, inside and out.

He energizes those who get tired,

gives fresh strength to dropouts.

For even young people tire and drop out,

young folk in their prime stumble and fall.

But those who wait upon GOD get fresh strength.

They spread their wings and soar like eagles,

They run and don’t get tired,

they walk and don’t lag behind.

—Isaiah 40:27-31

REFLECTION

We have three small children. It is inevitable that the more tired they get, the greater the whining and complaining becomes. It’s true in our own adult lives as well. We forget to rest, to call on the power of God to give us the grace and energy we need for the day, and then we become irritable, unfocused, and exhausted. There is nothing that God has asked us to do that he won’t give us the grace and energy for if we ask. Instead of running ahead full force on our own strength, wait for God’s direction and see what a difference that can make.

ACTION

Take your to-do list to God and sit in silent prayer to really listen to what he is asking of you today. If so inspired, take a few things off that list and give yourself time for rest.

MINDFUL OF MIRACLES

“The poor and homeless are desperate for water,
their tongues parched and no water to be found.
But *I’m* there to be found, I’m there for them,
and I, God of Israel, will not leave them thirsty.
I’ll open up rivers for them on the barren hills,
spout fountains in the valleys.
I’ll turn the baked-clay badlands into a cool pond,
the waterless waste into splashing creeks.
I’ll plant the red cedar in that treeless wasteland,
also acacia, myrtle, and olive.
I’ll place the cypress in the desert,
with plenty of oaks and pines.
Everyone will see this. No one can miss it—
unavoidable, indisputable evidence
That I, GOD, personally did this.
It’s created and signed by The Holy of Israel.

—Isaiah 41:17-20

REFLECTION

We take for granted the many miracles that happen in the course of the day. The changing of the seasons, the unfurling of a plant from a tiny seed as it pushes its way through the soil, the bumblebee that flies, a child born to a woman told she would never conceive, the cooling rains that quench the desert lands, the new drug that now treats a previous debilitating disease. God’s glory is made real in his creation, and through his creation, which includes you. He promises to bring wondrous and awesome restoration, making all that is broken whole again. It is unavoidable.

ACTION

Get off your couch, put down the phone and computer, and go outside. Marvel at the way in which God is restoring the earth right now. As we anticipate the coming of Christ, how is God restoring you? What role do you play in the restorative work of God?

STOP YOUR WHINING

“How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

—Matthew 11:16-19

REFLECTION

If you have children, it is possible that they have uttered the words above verbatim. Sometimes, no matter what you do, you just cannot please your children. They are intent on being disgruntled. Are you? In this volatile world we live in, sometimes we are drawn into the very behavior Jesus addresses above. Nothing anyone does satisfies us, and we find fault with everyone. We are swayed by others opinions instead of looking at the only One who should be our guide. We need to be less concerned about looking crazy or worrying about what others think, and more concerned with what Christ is asking of us.

ACTION

Compare the news headlines of the day to the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5. Make a note of the differences between what the world deems important and what Jesus calls blessed.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Next there arose like a flame a prophet whose word burned like a torch. The first thing he did was inflict a famine on the people. Many grew envious of his power, but most of these he weeded out. With the Lord’s advice and consent, he turned the rain off and the fire on—blitzing the earth three times.

—Sirach 48:1-4

REFLECTION

There are many loudmouths on the stage today. The proliferation of social media and the 24 hour news cycle makes it hard to avoid the cacophony. In the midst of this, we are, by our baptism, called to be prophets. The difference is that we are called to be loudmouths for the Lord, letting Jesus direct our words and actions. By our Christ-driven example, we can show the world that a prophet is not a palm reader, psychic, or carnival fortune teller. Rather, we are called to be prophets who proclaim the hope, wonder, and goodness of the Gospel message. We are called to be a light in the darkness.

ACTION

This evening, turn off all the lights and burn a candle. See how the flame lights the objects around it. Realizing that you are called to be that light by your baptism, what do you illuminate by your life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

I WILL
sing for joy
IN GOD

explode
with
praise
FROM
DEEP
IN MY
soul.

ISAIAH 61:10

SMILE AND SAY THANKS

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.

Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

REFLECTION

Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday—the halfway point of Advent where we rejoice at the impending arrival of the Messiah, the Light of the World. Are you feeling cheerful yet, or have the demands of Christmas preparation—the shopping, the menu planning...even the family obligations or bickering (because we all know it happens at the holidays)—begun to get you down? It is so tempting to throw up our hands and walk away from it all. Jesus calls us, though, to live in the tension and be selective in what we accept. Take what is good—what gives life, what brings joy, what keeps our focus on the wonder of this holy season—and throw the rest away.

ACTION

Decide today what you want to keep in your preparations for Christmas, and what might be better left undone. Be specific, and ask God for help making sure to thank him ahead of time.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

FOLLOW GOD FEARLESSLY

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—‘God saves’—because he will save his people from their sins.”

—Matthew 1:20-22

REFLECTION

Talk about vivid dreams! Joseph, who doesn’t even get a line of dialogue in the Gospel, receives this incredible message from an angel of God while he sleeps. How crazy is that? Mystical experiences like Joseph’s still happen today. We, in our never ending quest to understand everything, try to analyze away so many of our experiences. What if we considered the possibility that God was speaking through them instead? Would we have the courage, like Joseph, to act on those encounters?

ACTION

Ask God to reveal himself in a powerful way to you. Present to him in prayer thoughts or desires you feel he has placed on your heart, but that you have refused to act upon because of uncertainty. Seek guidance from a close, faithful friend or spiritual director to sort out whether God may be calling you to act.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DO NOT BE AFRAID

It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear.

But the angel reassured him, “Don’t fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You’re going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you—many will delight in his birth. He’ll achieve great stature with God.”

—Luke 1:8-15

REFLECTION

God is forever seeking to reassure us of the goodness of his promises. Zachariah and Elizabeth have long prayed for a child, and now they are beyond what is believed to be her childbearing years. Yet, here comes an angel of the Lord saying, “Hey! It’s happening!” Zachariah is paralyzed in fear. He does not trust that it can be because it has not been. So often in our lives we put human limitations on God’s abilities. God can do anything he wills. Do we truly believe that nothing is impossible with God?

ACTION

Are we afraid to surrender our will and understanding to God? What paralyzes us in fear? Our health? Finances? Relationships? Write a letter to God pouring out the desires of your heart to him, admitting your fears, and surrendering your will for his. “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

ASK FOR THE MOON

GOD spoke again to Ahaz. This time he said, “Ask for a sign from your God. Ask anything. Be extravagant. Ask for the moon!”

But Ahaz said, “I’d never do that. I’d never make demands like that on GOD!”

So Isaiah told him, “Then listen to this, government of David! It’s bad enough that you make people tired with your pious, timid hypocrisies, but now you’re making God tired. So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway. Watch for this: A girl who is presently a virgin will get pregnant. She’ll bear a son and name him Immanuel (God-With-Us).

—Isaiah 7:10-14

REFLECTION

Ahaz ruled Israel during a time of great crisis, and he didn’t always rule his kingdom the way God wanted. Yet, God tells Ahaz to ask extravagantly of him. A friend of ours always says to be bold with God. Are we? Too often we are like Ahaz who doesn’t want to trouble God out of a misguided notion of what it is to be holy. Seeking a sign from God is not always an act of distrust—it can be a desire for consolation. God is waiting! He wants to amaze us. He joyfully desires to give us everything—the moon if we ask—as a sign of his closeness to us. He is Immanuel, God with Us.

ACTION

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (called the Little Flower) said she would send down a shower of roses from heaven to show people how close our God is to us, and how much and deeply he loves us. Don’t be an Ahaz. Like Saint Thérèse, call upon God the Father with childlike wonder, trusting that he wants to show Himself to you. Write your prayer below.

.....

.....

.....

DON'T DESPAIR

So sing, Daughter Zion!
 Raise the rafters, Israel!
Daughter Jerusalem,
 be happy! celebrate!
GOD has reversed his judgments against you
 and sent your enemies off chasing their tails.
From now on, GOD is Israel's king,
 in charge at the center.
There's nothing to fear from evil
 ever again!
Jerusalem will be told:
 "Don't be afraid.
Dear Zion,
 don't despair.
Your GOD is present among you,
 a strong Warrior there to save you.
Happy to have you back, he'll calm you with his love
 and delight you with his songs.

—Zephaniah 3:14-17

REFLECTION

.....
We are just days away. You may be hurriedly finishing up your Christmas shopping, menu planning, or lamenting about the cards not yet sent. Don't despair! Set down the lists for a while and soak in the calming love of your Savior. God is in charge. Always has been, always will be. Even if those cards don't get sent, or the ham is burnt, Jesus is here and he is coming again. Get your voices ready to sing out in joy, "here is our God! We have nothing to fear!"

ACTION

.....
Sure, it's still Advent, but get your Christmas playlist out and blast some joyful music while you continue your holiday preparations. What are some of your favorite hymns?

BURSTING FORTH

And Mary said,
I'm bursting with God-news;
 I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
 I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
 the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
 on those who are in awe before him.

—Luke 1:46-50

REFLECTION

.....

We hear a lot about Mary in this season, because she exemplifies what it means to be a disciple of Jesus (and yes, gave birth to him). We see in her an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Upon her hearing that she would give birth to the Messiah, her first action is to serve—to “dance the song of her Savior God” to Elizabeth, her relative. Those of us who have endured the first trimester of pregnancy know that this isn’t always the first inclination. God calls us beyond ourselves. He asks us to look within to find him bursting forth. In allowing God to overflow in us to others, we become the ones most fortunate.

ACTION

.....

Do a little “God-dance”! Find little ways to be of service to a family member who is in need of knowing joy of the Lord. Invite them to celebrate Christmas with you at church and home this Christmas.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

WAIT FOR IT..

“Look! I’m sending my messenger on ahead to clear the way for me. Suddenly, out of the blue, the Leader you’ve been looking for will enter his Temple—yes, the Messenger of the Covenant, the one you’ve been waiting for. Look! He’s on his way!” A Message from the mouth of GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies.”

—Malachi 3:1

REFLECTION

While we commemorate the first coming of Christ every year on December 25, according to our Church calendar, Jesus is not bound by our schedules. So often, he comes to us suddenly, unannounced, at the most inconvenient of times. He shatters our complacency. He calls us to drop everything, to let go of what we have expected, to greet him with awe in whatever way he reveals Himself to us. Are you ready?

ACTION

Jesus often comes to us in distressing disguise, as Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to say. Today, look for Christ in those who normally repulse you —and admit that there are people who do (we are human)! Look for Jesus in those you would rather avoid—the annoying coworker, the argumentative relative, the needy friend, the dirty homeless person you pass each day, the crying baby at church, the woman who has multiple children by different fathers. Examine your heart as we prepare to receive Jesus when he comes.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

ALL
OUR

praise

RISE

to the

ONE

Romans 16:26

PRAISE HIM!

All of our praise rises to the One who is strong enough to make you strong, exactly as preached in Jesus Christ, precisely as revealed in the mystery kept secret for so long but now an open book through the prophetic Scriptures. All the nations of the world can now know the truth and be brought into obedient belief, carrying out the orders of God, who got all this started, down to the very last letter.

All our praise is focused through Jesus on this incomparably wise God! Yes!

—Romans 16:25-27

REFLECTION

Praise God! His love is no secret to us thanks to what has been revealed in Christ Jesus. His love is for us all. The God of the universe took on human form to wrap his arms around us, not because of anything we did, but because he desired to love us so deeply. Is there anything more amazing and awe-inspiring than this? The only response we can give is our adoration and joyful praise. God is with us—hallelujah!

ACTION

Turn off all distractions. Put away the Christmas to-do list. Turn off the television. Turn on the Christmas lights and light those candles. In the glow, reflect on the message of the angels as they proclaim the birth of Jesus to the shepherds as found in Luke, Chapter 2. Glory to God in the highest!

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BREAK INTO SONG! BOOM IT OUT!

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger bringing good news,
Breaking the news that all's well,
proclaiming good times, announcing salvation,
telling Zion, "Your God reigns!"
Voices! Listen! Your scouts are shouting, thunderclap shouts,
shouting in joyful unison.
They see with their own eyes
GOD coming back to Zion.
Break into song! Boom it out, ruins of Jerusalem:
"GOD has comforted his people!
He's redeemed Jerusalem!"
GOD has rolled up his sleeves.
All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm.
Everyone, from one end of the earth to the other,
sees him at work, doing his salvation work.

—Isaiah 52:7-10

MY REFLECTION ON CHRISTMAS

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

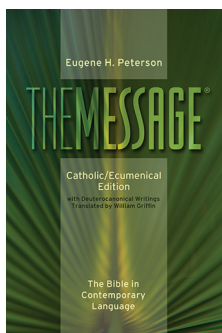
.....

.....

.....



Free Sample from ACTA



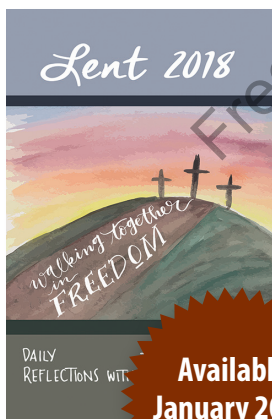
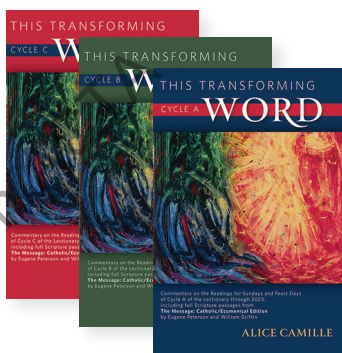
More of The Message

The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition

This recently published edition of *The Message* includes for the first time translations of the Deuterocanonical books, resulting in a complete Catholic Bible.

This Transforming Word

This series includes all of the Sunday and Feast Day Mass readings in *The Message* translation, as well as excellent reflections and questions by award-winning author and Scripture commentator Alice Camille.



Walking Together in Freedom

Timothy and Rakhi McCormick

New description. This booklet is designed to help us reflect on the Scripture passages for each day of Lent 2018 with a short excerpt from one of the daily Bible readings using *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*.

**Available
January 2018**

www.actapublications.com (800-397-2282)
or www.pastoralcenter.com (844-727-8672)

EXPECTANTLY WAITING IN WONDER

Reflections by Timothy and Rakhi McCormick

Illustrations by Rakhi McCormick

What does it mean to “wait expectantly in wonder”? Here is our chance to find out during this time of Advent. Led by Tim and Rakhi McCormick, a young couple with three small children, we read an excerpt from the daily readings in the Catholic liturgy for each day of Advent 2017 as taken from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, a contemporary translation of the Bible that “talks like we do.” The words from the daily Mass readings practically jump off the page, inviting us to prayer, conversion, and our own vocation as Christians at our jobs and studies, with our families and loved ones, and in our community and civic involvement. Combined with Rakhi’s whimsical art and Tim and Rakhi’s short but insightful reflections and ideas for practical action steps that anyone can take, this booklet makes a wonderful companion for a spiritually productive Advent journey.



Timothy and Rakhi McCormick

have been married for eight years and have three children. Timothy is a high school theology teacher. Rakhi, who runs her own creative business, has worked in a variety of ministries including campus ministry and young adult ministry. Most recently she has worked in a maternity home. The McCormicks make their home in suburban Detroit.