

ADVENT 2025



A RESOURCE FOR
SECONDARY SCHOOLS



ABOUT



This resource invites participants to journey through the four weeks of Advent, reflecting on the Scripture readings and sharing in the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world. Each week, one of the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love is explored, through quotes, Scripture, reflections, reflection questions, possible actions and prayer.

About Caritas Australia

As the Catholic Church's international aid and development agency, Caritas Australia works hand in hand with the most marginalised and remote communities in Australia and overseas, to confront the challenges of poverty. Through locally-led programs we work with all people, with shared hope and compassion, towards a world where all can thrive and reach their full potential. Through partnerships with local organisations and Church networks, and as a member of Caritas Internationalis, one of the largest humanitarian networks in the world, we are able to reach where the need is greatest and work together for a just future.

About Advent

Advent marks the beginning of the Church's new year and is a season of waiting and preparation. In fact, the season of Advent focuses on Christ's threefold coming—past, present and future.

We await and prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas.

We hope and give thanks for Christ's presence in us and in the Word and sacraments.

We look to the future, waiting for Christ to come again.

In the coming four weeks, we prepare with mounting expectation for the coming of Christ in a spirit of waiting, conversion and hope.

Structure

Each week:

- Pause to contemplate some words of wisdom from Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV and pray the Advent prayer
- Light an Advent wreath candle
- Hear the Scripture readings (*The Jerusalem Bible*)
- Reflect on the theme, following the Cardijn See–Judge–Act–Pray rhythm:
 - See a Caritas story
 - Judge how the Advent theme is at work in this and in your own story
 - Act in response to all you have reflected on
 - Pray to gather your thoughts and intentions and commit them to God.



We are a valued partner of the Australian Government, receiving flexible funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) each year to implement development and poverty alleviation programs overseas.



ADVENT



INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Leader: Explain the structure for each session as outlined on the previous page. Introduce Caritas Australia as the international aid and development organisation of the Catholic Church in Australia. Explain that through sharing the stories of the people with whom Caritas Australia works, we can acknowledge that we are all part of one global family. For more information you could watch [Compassion in Action](#) (2 mins) or use our [Introduction to Caritas Australia](#) PowerPoint presentation.

What is Advent?

Leader: Introduce the season of Advent by watching this video [Advent in two minutes](#).

Advent Pause and Prayer

At the beginning of each session (before lighting the Advent wreath candle) we will read a short quote from Pope Francis or Pope Leo XIV and pause for a moment to focus on the weekly theme (hope, peace, joy, love). We'll close our moment of quiet contemplation by saying the Advent prayer, 'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Lighting the Advent Wreath Candles



The word 'Advent' means 'coming'. Lighting the candles on the wreath symbolises the coming of light (Jesus) into the world. The first candle (violet) represents hope, the second (violet) peace, the third (rose) joy, and the fourth (violet) love. The central white candle is lit on Christmas Day and represents Christ. This Advent, we will learn, act and pray for a more just and fair world – a world full of hope, peace, joy and love, where we realise that 'everything is connected'.

Making the Advent Wreath a daily focus

The Advent Wreath helps us focus on the coming of Christ at Christmas. And, as Pope Francis reminded us, this coming of Christ 'is the foundation of our hope.' (Angelus 27 November 2022).

If you don't have an Advent wreath, consider making one. (Instructions can be found at www.caritas.org.au/advent.) Everyone gathers around the wreath and someone lights the candle(s). The Leader prays the prayer for the week.



"Your Lord is coming"...
This is the foundation of our hope.

Pope Francis, *Angelus* 27 November 2022





Hope



FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



“This is what true hope consists of: not in trying to avoid pain, but in believing that even in the heart of the most unjust suffering, the seed of new life is hidden”

Pope Leo XIV, *General Audience* 27th August 2025



Pause and pray

‘Come, Lord Jesus.’

Light a candle

As we light this first candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your everlasting hope. Amen.

Hear Scripture *(Readings are from the First Sunday of Advent)*

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the Scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Isaiah 2:1-5

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In the days to come the mountain of the Temple of the Lord shall tower above the mountains and be lifted higher than the hills.

All the nations will stream to it, peoples without number will come to it; and they will say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths; since the Law will go out from Zion, and the oracle of the Lord from Jerusalem.’

He will wield authority over the nations and adjudicate between many peoples; these will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war.

O House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.



Romans 13:11-14

A reading from Romans

You know 'the time' has come: you must wake up now: our salvation is even nearer than it was when we were converted. The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon – let us give up all the things we prefer to do under the cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light. Let us live decently as people do in the daytime: no drunken orgies, no promiscuity or licentiousness, and no wrangling or jealousy. Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24:37-44

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'





Worknesh's story

Worknesh, mother of three and a member of Degebon Women's saving group. Photo: Maheder Tadesse/Caritas Australia



Worknesh is a mother and coffee and vegetable farmer who lives in southern Ethiopia. The area she lives in is prone to natural disasters, including droughts and landslides.

During lean seasons, families like Worknesh's are often at risk of hunger. The income from the coffee beans that Worknesh grows only lasts three months. So, she grows staple food like millet and vegetables, but it is often a struggle to have enough food to feed her family. Worknesh fears for her children, as poor nutrition takes a toll on their growth and education.

Despite the challenges, Worknesh's life has begun to change for the better, thanks to a Caritas-supported program that has helped her improve her family's food security and economic stability.

It supports communities through farming, income generation, water improvement technology and land and forest conservation practices. Vegetable seeds have also been provided by the program and as a result Worknesh has been able to provide a more reliable and nutritious food source for her family.

"After engaging in the project, I am able to produce vegetables to secure my family food security problem and to increase my family income with the surplus product," Worknesh said.

Through the program, Worknesh also gained business management skills and joined a women's savings group, allowing her to access new income streams in turn strengthening her future.

While the road ahead is still challenging and climate change continues to pose a threat to food security, Worknesh's journey is a testament to the power of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Thanks to the program, she now has the knowledge, resources, and confidence to forge a future for her children that is free from hunger.

Along with your generosity, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



We are all tempted to lose hope. That temptation does not come from a good place. In today's Gospel, Jesus seems aware of a climate of dread in the world around him and surely, we can relate to that. He remembers the story of Noah when people were living regular lives until the flood 'came and swept all away.' The story of someone breaking into a house might even remind us of the robberies that seem to take place in our towns and suburbs.

We can't conclude that the world is a dark place. That is called despair and despair never comes from God. Instead, we might look at the experience of Worknesh and her children. Worknesh lives in Ethiopia and has had to face all the upheavals we hear about in the Gospel, and more. But a program you are supporting through Caritas is making an impact and creating hope.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus uses two words for Hope. They are 'stay awake.' He tells the people of his time to keep their eyes open. The message is the same for us. We can help heal the world, but we can't be complacent or doze off.

Advent begins a new Church year. Let's all make a spiritual new year's resolution. It can be simply to stay awake. To be alive to the needs of Worknesh and her family. To be sensitive to the pain of all God's family. The letter to the Romans reminds us that it will soon be daylight. The time of the Lord is coming! Let us work to make that a reality.

Reflection Questions:

1. What does hope look like for you?
2. What opportunities has Worknesh had that she has turned to for a hope-filled future?
3. In today's world, how are you called to 'stay awake'?
4. How can Advent be a hope-filled time in your life?



- Learn more about the food security and share that with the school community.
- Certified Fairtrade products ensure growers are given fair wages, safe working conditions and use environmentally sustainable practices. If buying gifts for Christmas, try and purchase [Fairtrade products](#) to ensure growers around the world are treated with dignity and respect.
- Reflect on ways in which you can help the school community prepare their heart for Christmas, while reaching out to others with love.



God of Hope

May farmers like Worknesh, find hope in you as they sow seeds in
the hope of an abundant harvest.

Fill us with that same hope,
Enliven us to become sources of hope in our homes, in our school
and in our world.

Amen.



Peace



SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



Peace is built in the heart and from the heart, by eliminating pride and vindictiveness and carefully choosing our words.

Pope Leo XIV, Audience to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps, May 2025



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this second candle on our Advent wreath, we pray for the many places in the world that are in special need of peace. We pray that we too may be filled with your deep peace. Amen.

Hear Scripture *(Readings are from the Second Sunday of Advent)*

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Isaiah 11:1-10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,
a scion thrusts from his roots:
on him the spirit of the Lord rests,
a spirit of wisdom and insight,
a spirit of counsel and power,
a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. (The fear of the Lord is his breath.)
He does not judge by appearances,
he gives no verdict on hearsay,
but judges the wretched with integrity,
and with equity gives a verdict for the poor of the land.

His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless,
his sentences bring death to the wicked.

Integrity is the loincloth round his waist,
faithfulness the belt about his hips.

The wolf lives with the lamb,
the panther lies down with the kid,
calf and lion cub feed together
with a little boy to lead them.
The cow and the bear make friends,
their young lie down together.
The lion eats straw like the ox.
The infant plays over the cobra's hole;
into the viper's lair
the young child puts his hand.
They do no hurt, no harm,
on all my holy mountain,
for the country is filled with the knowledge of
the Lord as the waters swell the sea.
That day, the root of Jesse shall stand as a
signal to the peoples. It will be sought out by
the nations and its home will be glorious.



Romans 15:4-9

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

Everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God. And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It can only be to God's glory, then, for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you. The reason Christ became the servant of circumcised Jews was not only so that God could faithfully carry out the promises made to the patriarchs, it was also to get the pagans to give glory to God for his mercy, as scripture says in one place: For this I shall praise you among the pagans and sing your name.

Matthew 3:1-12

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'



Liudmyla's story

Liudmyla, a 46-year-old displaced person from Kherson, Ukraine, had to flee her home after her village was invaded by Russian force.. Photo: Svitlana Dmytrenko/Caritas Australia



Before the war in Ukraine, Liudmyla, her husband and family lived a simple farming life. They cultivated a large garden, raised chickens and lived off their land. Her husband worked in construction, providing them with a stable income. Their home, which they purchased and renovated with their own hands, was a source of pride.

"We had everything," she recalled. "We worked hard for it, and it was ours."

Russia invaded Ukraine while Liudmyla was in hospital. She discharged herself from the hospital so that she could be with her family at home. Liudmyla and her family endured weeks in hiding, not leaving their house, surviving on what little food they had and baking bread at home.

Liudmyla and her family have fled to safety, twice. Her daughter with Down syndrome struggled most during these times and she was deeply traumatised by the constant threat of shelling.

They are now supported by Caritas Ukraine, who are providing humanitarian support in the form of food kits, hygiene supplies and clean water. Caritas Ukraine's children-friendly spaces also offer support. They provide psychological, social and emotional support and counselling for children and parents, as well as joint child-parent activities.

Liudmyla cannot work and earn income because she cares for her daughter and her brother, a soldier wounded in combat.

"I'm getting really good help from Caritas. They give me everything, everything."

For Liudmyla, her dream is simple: "For the war to end. And for it to end soon. For everything to be like it was.

"Even if it's damaged, it will all be rebuilt. We have hands. Everything will be rebuilt, we'll do it all."



The Prophet Isaiah shares beautiful images this week of a world made safe and whole. 'Calf and lion feed together with a little boy to lead them.' A child might even play beside the hole of a venomous snake. They are images of peace.

Such pictures are a long way from our reality. For the past years, the war in Ukraine has unsettled us all on a daily basis. We wonder why God allows such things to happen and then must remind ourselves that God took a big risk when humans were provided with the gift of freedom. Freedom means we can get things wrong.

Caritas Australia shares a story of trying to make things right. It begins with making sure people such as Liudmyla and her family, who have borne the brunt of the war, have what they need to not just survive but to think about rebuilding.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist speaks bluntly to people in power. He says, 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'

Liudmyla is among millions of people in the world who have no choice but to walk on paths that have been broken and destroyed, often because those in authority are blind. Yet the Psalm reminds us 'Justice shall flourish in this time and fullness of peace forever.' We are called to make this happen.

Reflection Questions

1. What does peace mean and look like for you?
2. How do the words 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight', resonate in your life?
3. It is often said that peace begins at home. How could peace in individual homes all over the world result in peace in the world at large?
4. How are we called to be people of peace, for people like Liudmyla?



- Is there something that keeps you from feeling at peace in your relationships with family or friends? It might be time to ask for forgiveness.
- Pray St Francis of Assisi's prayer. Spend some time with God reflecting on how you can be an instrument of God's peace.
- Be an agent of peace and help others in your school or local community enjoy the spirit of Christmas this year. Volunteer in an outreach program, organise a Christmas hamper or toy appeal in your community.



Peaceful God,

May all in our human family who live with unrest, especially those in Ukraine and Russia feel your hand of peace.

Show us your peace in the quiet, often unseen moments of our days; a gentle breeze, the morning sunrise and the calmness of a stranger.

Make us instruments of peace in our homes, in our community and in our world.

Amen



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



“Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of hope”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* n244 May 2015



Pause and pray

‘Come, Lord Jesus.’

Light a candle

As we light this third candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your overflowing joy. Amen.

Hear Scripture *(Readings are from the Third Sunday of Advent)*

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult,
let the wasteland rejoice and bloom,
let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil,
let it rejoice and sing for joy.

The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they shall see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.

Strengthen all weary hands,
steady all trembling knees
and say to all faint hearts,
Courage! Do not be afraid.

‘Look, your God is coming,
vengeance is coming,
the retribution of God;
he is coming to save you.’

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
the ears of the deaf unsealed,
then the lame shall leap like a deer
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy;
for those the Lord has ransomed shall return.
They will come to Zion shouting for joy,
everlasting joy on their faces;
joy and gladness will go with them
and sorrow and lament be ended.



James 5:7-10

A reading from the letter of St James:

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 11:2-11

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'





Nimol's story

Nimol, a young Cambodian woman, joined youth networks to bring about environmental change in her community. Photo: Kimheang Tuon/Caritas Australia



Nimol, a young Cambodian woman, and her youth network are quietly transforming their community. The region is rich in natural beauty, but it faces mounting environmental threats—particularly waste pollution and the declining health of the river. Nimol has found her voice, her purpose, and a strong sense of solidarity as a volunteer in two Caritas supported programs.

The networks empower local youth, especially young women, to better understand water as a resource. They promote meaningful participation and decision-making processes to drive change.

Not long ago, Nimol didn't feel confident. "I wasn't very brave when it came to speaking," she recalls. "I didn't know much about environmental issues, and I didn't feel comfortable speaking up or taking the lead."

Through the projects, Nimol was introduced to a new world. "It opened my eyes," she said. "I began to understand how our everyday small actions impact the river and the environment. And I realised I had a role to play in changing that."

Since then, Nimol has become a force for change in her village. She participates in clean-up events, educates her villages about responsible waste management, and inspires other youth—especially young women to get involved. "I've seen real changes," she said. "Our village is cleaner than before. People are throwing away less trash, and the bins we received from the project have really helped."

"I've gained confidence, made new friends, and learned how to express myself and share ideas," Nimol shared. Her dream is to see a greener, cleaner community where rivers are protected, young people can learn from one another, and rural youth have access to meaningful job opportunities.

"In remote areas like ours, opportunities are rare, but this project gave me hope and valuable skills. I want to keep learning and growing, and I hope more young people will do the same."

Along with your generosity, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Many people know what it means to wait for rain, especially as summer becomes more intense. Primary producers rely on having the right rainfall at the right time. They really need things to go their way, which doesn't seem to happen often. You have to admire their resilience.

The image of water looms large in the readings for the Third Sunday of Advent, so close to our celebration of the coming of the Lord at Christmas. The prophet Isaiah is breathless with anticipation. 'Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult,' he sings. The letter of James asks us to think of a farmer waiting for rain in autumn and spring. 'You too have to be patient. Do not lose heart.'

Caritas Australia has a deep understanding of how a shortage of fresh water can destroy communities and create destitution. In Cambodia, Nimol is one of many people who are learning about the complicated social and environmental issues that guarantee water supply. She waits for her river to regain health. But it is an active waiting. Waiting can be hard work, especially if it involves clearing away rubbish so that Earth can regain health.

Jesus reminds people in the Gospel of St Matthew that they need to look beyond surfaces. When they went to the wilderness to see John the Baptist, did they expect a man in fine clothes? No. Jesus says that the proof of God's presence is that 'Good news is proclaimed to the poor.' We too are called to be that Good News.

Reflection Questions

1. What is joy and what does it look like for you?
2. Patience and joy are themes that run through the readings and Nimol's story. What examples do you see of these themes?
3. We live in a world of instant gratification, yet it isn't always possible. Nimol shows that sometimes we must actively wait. In what ways can you actively wait for something you are passionate about?
4. Joy is often not without struggle or tension. What tensions/struggles has Nimol had to hold to find joy?



- By learning and mentoring others, Nimol has given hope and joy to her community. Share her joy-filled story with your school community.
- Think of ways you could share active joy with your community and be the Good News as we approach Christmas.
- Consider sharing the joy of Caritas Australia's work through a [Global Gift](#).



Joyful God,
May those who willingly learn, teach and challenge unjust ways, like Nimol,
find joy in following in your Son's footsteps.
Teach us to open our eyes to see, our ears to hear and our hands to
embrace that which needs to be changed.
Make us joyful witnesses as we seek change for the good of all.
Amen



Love



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT



"A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today."

Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te Deum* n120



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this fourth candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your restoring love. Amen.

Hear Scripture *(Readings are from the Fourth Sunday of Advent)*

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Isaiah 7:10-14

A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

The Lord spoke to Ahaz and said, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign for yourself coming either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above.' 'No', Ahaz answered 'I will not put the Lord to the test.'

Then Isaiah said:

'Listen now, House of David:
are you not satisfied with trying the patience of men
without trying the patience of my God, too?

The Lord himself, therefore,
will give you a sign.

It is this: the maiden is with child
and will soon give birth to a son
whom she will call Immanuel,
a name which means "God-is-with-us".'



Romans 1:1-7

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans:

From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus who has been called to be an apostle, and specially chosen to preach the Good News that God promised long ago through his prophets in the scriptures.

This news is about the Son of God, who, according to the human nature he took, was a descendant of David: it is about Jesus Christ our Lord who, in the order of the spirit, the spirit of holiness that was in him, was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection from the dead. Through him we received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith to all pagan nations in honour of his name. You are one of these nations, and by his call belong to Jesus Christ. To you all, then, who are God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.

Matthew 1:18-24

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son
and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.





Pronali's story

Pronali on her way to a village to conduct maternal health checks.
Photo: Sumon Corraya/Caritas Bangladesh.



In remote villages of Bangladesh, where more than half the population lives below the poverty line and indigenous communities often lack access to education and healthcare, maternal health remains a critical concern. For many, giving birth without trained support is an everyday reality, putting both mother and child at risk. Pronali, an indigenous woman from a small village in Bangladesh, knows this struggle firsthand.

After completing secondary school, financial hardship forced Pronali to abandon further studies, and she married young. She had 2 children and experienced difficulty giving birth.

"During delivery I had a lot of complications," Pronali recalls. "I thought if I can help others in my own way, so that no one else has to suffer, it would be a blessing."

With support from Caritas Australia's partner, Caritas Bangladesh, Pronali completed an intensive training course on safe motherhood practices. She learned to recognise early warning signs, perform basic health checks such as blood pressure and weight monitoring, and refer high-risk cases to government clinics.

As a rural midwife, Pronali has become an essential member of her community and a vital support for expectant mothers.

Before her training, there wasn't a single qualified midwife in her village. That is why her impact has been so significant.

"Now every day pregnant women come to me for check-ups and call me for home deliveries," Pronali says. "The villagers and family members honour me as an important person – their family health provider."

Pronali's dedication is proving that when women are empowered, entire communities thrive.

Along with your generosity, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



There are shopping centres around us where all the businesses stay open around the clock as we approach Christmas. If you happen to need new saucepans at two in the morning, or new wallpaper at three, then now is your chance.

Of course, shopping can be a big distraction, especially when it comes to celebrating the birth of Jesus. Have you noticed how much quiet seems to gather around the occasion? The shepherds are in their fields under the stars. Joseph, in the Gospel reading, has plenty to worry about. His beloved Mary is expecting. Yet still he manages to sleep, and his dream lays open a future.

Some of our favourite carols and traditions bring stillness with them. We sing 'Silent Night', even though baby Jesus probably cried as much as any baby. Families walk quietly up and down their local streets at night to admire the lights. St Luke tells us that Mary 'pondered all things in her hearts.' Pondering is a beautiful activity. Or non-activity. We need more of it!

Caritas Australia shares with us the story of Pronali, an indigenous woman from a remote part of Bangladesh. Like Mary, she was a young mother. Like Mary, she said a big 'Yes.' Both young women were open and fearless in the face of life's offerings. In the case of Pronali, that meant training in midwifery to help those with limited access to health care.

Mary's famous prayer says, 'He raises up the lowly.' As we celebrate the birth of the Lord of Life, we too are called to help raise the lowly. Even in the busiest times, let's ponder the marvels the Lord can do for us and through us.

Reflection Questions

1. What does the love we see in Pronali's story, look like in your own?
2. Jesus' coming was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. How can we prepare for that coming as a school community?
3. Pronali has shown love through her actions both in her family and the community. In what ways can you show love to others? Remember it can be in words and/or deeds.
4. In a season that is often filled with distractions, how will you take time to ponder?



Love extends to all facets of our lives, to God, people and planet.

- How can you show love for God?
- How can you show love for others?
- How can you show love for God's creation?



God of Love,

May women like Pronali, feel your loving presence as they tend women in their communities - bringing new life into the world.

Make us advocates of love in our communities, holding the hurt, the lost and the lonely in a loving embrace.

Help us to cherish and celebrate the moments we witness your love.

Amen



Shop Global Gift Christmas Cards

When you purchase a Christmas card for your loved one, it's an act of compassion. Every card helps provide clean water, education, and food security to vulnerable communities worldwide.

Your guide to meaningful giving this Christmas:

Step 1: Choose a cause that matters to you.

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