



Journey to Our Lady

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<i>My Dear Friends</i>	1
<i>The Conception of Christ</i>	1
<i>Prayer</i>	2
<i>Wonderful Are Your Works!</i>	2
<i>God First Loved Us</i>	3
<i>Time of Fulfillment</i>	3
<i>Prayer</i>	3
<i>Dear Angel</i>	4
<i>Member of the Family</i>	4

My Dear Friends,

Here we are again with a new year, new resolutions, and new goals. How many of those resolutions and goals will each of us keep or reach? Nowadays, the weeks and months go by so quickly; it is hard enough just to keep up with daily demands and unforeseen events. So what do we do?

Well, let's start at the beginning. Why? Because everything we do requires a beginning, a starting point, a plan, a foundation from which to build.

God's plan for each of us is to join Him for eternal life in Heaven. Do we keep that in mind when we set our resolutions and goals? If we don't we should because God gives us the foundation for our lives.

God knows every step we must take to live a good life on earth in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He knows the very fiber of our being. "You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb...My very self you know" [Psalm 139:13,14]. Because God knows us and what we need, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Try as we do to go it alone, God knows we cannot. "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit because without me you can do nothing," said the Lord [John 15:5]. One could argue that we can exist without God, but with God there is so much more to life than what we can imagine living on our own.

With God, we experience the greatest love we will ever know. With God, we know how to plan and carry out every resolution, every goal, and every moment of our lives—with faith, hope, and charity. With the prayers of the Blessed Mother to help us, let us continue our journey.

The Conception of Christ

To save us from damnation, God conceived a plan—and in this conception comes Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. This masterful plan, flawless in every detail, is God's loving gift to each of us—ours to accept or reject. A choice made possible by Mary, the Blessed Virgin, who chose to accept Christ's conception within her—body and soul.

With Mary's acceptance came Mary's willingness to face all the risks of bringing Jesus into the world. Risks that many of us are not willing to take; risks that come with living our faith in a growing secular world and rejecting temptations in the midst of peer pressure to do otherwise.

Let us not forget that Mary was not alone in making her decision. With faith, hope, and love, Mary humbly put herself in God's hands. Then in perfect unity, the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed Mary; Christ was conceived—manifesting God's merciful love for each of us.

In his greatness, our Lord truly became little for our sake. Entering His mother's womb—and as we all begin—becoming a microscopic cell that divides and multiplies, develops and grows. From that humble beginning, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

From conception to birth, through living and dying, Christ experienced every phase and took every step to become one with us on earth. That is how much God loves humanity and sees our lives as (See story, pg.2) >

(Conception of Christ, cont'd from pg. 1)

worth saving. “Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows,” said our Lord [Matthew 10:30, 31].

Therefore isn’t it fitting that each of us experiences every phase—the joys, the works, the sorrows, and the glories—and follows every step of our Lord’s to become one with Him for eternal life in Heaven? Or at the very least, lead better and less sinful lives than we do right now? Because our Lord started life as we all do and lived life among us, He knows every doubt, every fear, and every anxious moment that can tempt us and stop us on our journey toward Heaven.

“So do not worry and say ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself,” said Jesus [Matthew 6:31-34].

Yes, we have challenges and fears, some of which are overwhelming. Let us look to Christ and learn how to respond from Him. Christ met every challenge with faith, hope, love, and mercy even in His darkest hour. And by rising again, Jesus conquered sin and death for us so that we too may experience the loving intimacy of the Trinitarian life. To live in unity with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is God’s plan for us—a plan that we can accept or reject.

Let us also look to Mary. All human—Mary’s life shows us that choices make a difference. Mary’s yes at the Annunciation opened the way for Christ to enter our world to change our lives for the better because with God nothing is impossible. With Mary to guide us, may we choose to live for God’s sake just as Christ lived for our sake. Then with faith, hope, and merciful love emanating from our souls, may God’s plan live within us and through us all the days of our lives. #

Prayer

*Dearest Mother,
I long for peace
in my heart, mind,
and soul.
Help me always
to make the
right choices.
Help me
to understand
and accept that
without God,
I can do nothing.
May I find comfort
in knowing that
with God,
nothing is impossible.
Please intercede
on my behalf
and
may I be worthy of
God’s loving graces
to guide me
in my daily living.
Amen.*

“Wonderful Are Your Works!”

“Lord,...you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar...with all my ways you are familiar...Lord, you know it all.” [Psalm 139:1-4]

Wow! Let’s ponder the fact that God knows our inmost being. God knows all the good we are capable of doing. He knows the beauty we can bring to the world with His grace.

Because He knew us even before we were born, God knows exactly what we need to live at our very best even with all the temptations in the world. Christ came into the world to show us the way, the truth, and the life.

Christ’s life on earth teaches us how divine grace can carry us through our challenges, struggles, trials, and triumphs. Grace is God’s help. With God’s help, an inner peace embraces us and radiates through us—just as it did with Mary our Blessed Mother—thereby sharing good will with all around us.

The Almighty also gives us free will—to say yes or no to Him; to accept or reject Him and His loving graces. Why would anyone reject God’s help? Well, the temptation is there to strike out on our own.

We see what happens when God is pushed away from our daily living. We get caught on that slippery slope of compromising our moral values and beliefs when we think they get in the way of what we want in and out of life where real peace is hard to find.

However, with God’s help we can push temptation away to live as His loving, faithful children. In doing so, we are able to live and act in this world according to God’s will for the sake of our salvation, thereby strengthening the bonds between Heaven and earth.

Lord, You do everything to draw us close to You and give us everything we need to live and love one another. “Wonderful are your works!” [Ps 139:14] With Your grace, may we work to spread the beauty of peace and good will. #

God First Loved Us

Consider this: So great is God's love—He loved each of us before we were ever born and because He first loved us—He created love—we have the ability to love one another.

Why then do so many of us question the greatness of God's love and even the existence of God? Do such doubts exist because there are those who do not wish to acknowledge that all good first comes from God and not from us? Just as life begins with God, love begins with God.

Because God's very being is love, He gives us the foundation to love even in our most difficult circumstances. Understandably, that is hard—and at times we may think impossible—to do, especially when we have been harmed. God knows that too.

Therefore, Christ came into the world and took on sin, persecution, betrayal, hatred, fear, pain, and suffering. Through it all He did not lose His love for humanity; that is how much God values each one of us. In Christ, we see the face of God's merciful love—love that comes into our being through the Holy Spirit.

"If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is brought to perfection in us," according to the First Letter of John. "God is love and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him...as he is, so are we in this world" [1 John 4:12, 16, 17]. Nothing is impossible when we live in unity with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We are born to share God's love in all that we do through our compassion, generosity, mercy, and companionship. The key is to remain in God's love. Although Baptism washes away our original sin, we are still prone to temptations that pull us away from God. We can overcome those temptations with the love of Mary who draws us to her Son who draws us to our Father in Heaven. Thankfully, God first loved us. With God, love never fades or dies. May the love of God remain in each of us all the days of our lives. #

Time of Fulfillment

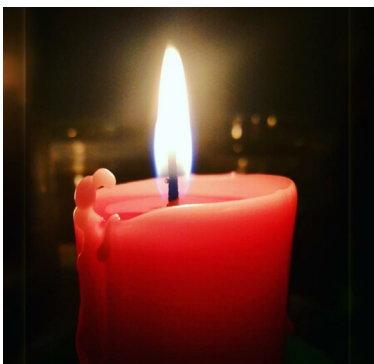
We all want a sense of fulfillment in our lives—a sense of achievement or of making a dream come true. In other words, each one of us wants a reason for living. We want to be destined to do more than just live to pay bills.

However, many of us reject the fulfillment we can find only with God. "In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us," according to the Letter to the Ephesians. "In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth." [Eph 1:7-10]

This fulfillment comes with accepting the Spirit of the Lord into our lives in order to do the Lord's bidding. The Spirit of the Lord comes to us with great gifts: Wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear—wonder—of the Lord so that we are able to follow divine inspirations. The Holy Spirit perfects within us: Charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

In other words, we are given the disposition to do good in accordance with God's will and His grace. Consider Mary, our Blessed Mother. Mary had nothing in terms of material wealth, and yet, Mary was fulfilled. In unity with the Holy Spirit, Mary shares God's graces to help those searching for what only God provides through Jesus Christ.

Now is the time of fulfillment; now is the time to repent and believe in the Gospel—to believe in God's promises. "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life," said the Lord [John 8:12]. With the Spirit of the Lord within us, we can find fulfillment and share the light of life to help those who are still searching. #



Prayer

*Heavenly Mother,
Lead me to your Son
Jesus Christ
and*

*help me to gaze
upon the face of
God's love
in my prayers.*

*May the love of God
enter my
heart, mind, and soul.*

*Help me
to be worthy
of all of
God's graces
and*

*give me the courage
to share all
that God gives to me
with His love.*

*May I always see
the light of life
and
help others who are lost
in the darkness.
Amen.*

Dear Angel,

Help me to find the fulfillment that God wants me to have by making the proper choices in my life. May God's Wisdom guide me in what I say and what I do, how I treat myself and others, and how I handle my trials and triumphs.

With this Wisdom, I am never alone. Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, had faith, hope, and charity as her constant companions during her earthly lifetime. Forever united with Jesus in the work for our redemption, Mary continues to guide those searching for help and salvation to God's Wisdom.

Help me to rely on God's Wisdom so that the choices I make are according to God's will. Amen.



Member of the Family

When the Son of God made man was born, He entered the human world and became the loving, obedient Son of Joseph and Mary. Let us ponder this: God became little to be a member of the human family so that we can grow spiritually to become a member of the Holy family.

To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, we are invited to be loving and obedient children of God. When we accept this invitation, we accept conformity to God's will. Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, shows us the way to join Heaven's family here on earth and for all eternity.

With littleness comes humility and recognition of our need for God. Recognizing this need for themselves and humanity, Mary and Joseph, in their loving obedience, put themselves and baby Jesus in God's hands. We too are placed in God's hands when we are baptized. With our original sin washed away, we receive the "grace of new birth in God the Father, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit," according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC 683].

Baptism is the first sacrament of faith. With faith, comes love; with love, comes hope. Faith, hope, and love were the mainstay of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph's lives. If we are steadfast in our faith, hope, and love, like Jesus we can grow in wisdom and favor before God as His beloved children, and like Joseph and Mary, we can have peace of mind even in our most difficult times.

We are not always going to understand the events in our lives; that may tempt us to pull away from God's hands. Joseph and Mary never pulled away. They remained obedient to God's will which is to love our Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love one another as God loves us.

To obey these commandments is to understand that God's entire being is love. With His love comes mercy and with God's merciful love, we are welcomed into His heavenly family for all eternity provided that we choose to be part of His family on earth. Ours is a choice to make just as it was for Mary and Joseph. Both said yes to God's call. Where would our world be without their love for God and for humanity?

Joseph's patience, perseverance, hard work, and actions as a loving husband, foster father, and protector demonstrated his obedience to God. Of course, Mary was most assuredly obedient living in perfect unity with the Holy Trinity. Through Mary, the Holy Spirit brought the first disciples into communion with Christ who leads all to God the Father. With Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as our guides, let each of us say yes to God's invitation into His family so that we may live in loving unity with the Holy Trinity here on earth and help draw others into the Holy family's fold for eternal life in Heaven.

Journey to Our Lady

Pray to Our Lady on the last Sunday of each month in the Great Upper Church at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Mass begins at 2 p.m., followed by Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction, the Rosary, and prayers. The Shrine is located at 400 Michigan Avenue, NE in Washington, D.C.

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