



## Pastor Page – Pastor Phil

### First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37 Year B

**Prayer of the Day:** Stir up Your power, Lord Christ, and come. By Your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of Your new day, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

The renowned catcher, manager and coach for the New York Yankees, Yogi Berra, was giving a friend directions to his home. The road divided, then came together. He said, "When you get to a fork in the road, take it."

That sums up our Scripture Readings this month. They move in two directions. We prepare for Jesus' birth and for His coming again. As nights grow longer and colder we dispel the darkness with bright lights and decorations. Leaves have fallen but we decorate evergreen trees. We gather for parties, send cards, and cherish happy feelings. After all, this is the season of "peace on earth, goodwill to all," as angels sing to shepherds (*Luke 2:14*). This is also a season of redemption. Reindeer laugh at Rudolph and call him names because his nose glows. But on a dark and stormy Christmas Eve Santa asks him to lead his team because his nose can cut through the murk. Rudolph goes down in history. Charlie Brown gets a scrawny tree for the school Christmas play. Other children laugh at him. Humiliated, he takes his tree and goes home. He is shocked to see that Snoopy's doghouse has won first place in a decorating contest. He takes a ball from Snoopy's doghouse and hangs it on his tree. The tree bends over. Discouraged, he goes inside. When other children come, Linus says, "I never thought it was such a bad little tree. It's not bad at all, really. Maybe it just needs a little love." He wraps his blanket around the base for support. Children take decorations from Snoopy's doghouse and put them on the tree. They start singing. Charlie Brown hears them and comes outside. He stares at his tree, now bright and beautiful. They call in unison, "Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown!" Everyone sings. And, of course, Ebenezer Scrooge is "scared straight" by the ghost of his deceased partner, Jacob Marley, and three spirits who show him what a dire fate awaits him if he does not change his ways. Yet Linus is the only one who quotes the Christmas story in Scripture (*Luke 2:8-14*). And everyone who revels on "the Christmas spirit" sets themselves up for "the January crash" when the holidays are over. There is an option.

That option is gratitude. But it goes deeper than thank-you notes for Christmas presents. The Apostle Paul declares, "since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they are now justified by [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (*Romans 3:23-24*). We sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. Yet God loves us so much that God sent Jesus to redeem us and to bring us out of darkness of sin and selfishness (*John 3:16, 12:36; 1 Peter 2:9*). The world hates this and opposes it, sometimes violently (*John 15:18*).

Our Scripture Readings encourage gratitude during difficult times. In our First Reading, the prophet Isaiah laments with people who have had their hopes shattered. They had visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed people of God (*Chs. 40-55*). After they returned from the Babylonian Exile, they experienced ruin, conflict and famine. Isaiah joins them in calling God to deliver them, as God had in the past. (*64:1-9*). *Psalm 80* is a group lament, a prayer for deliverance from national enemies. In our Second Reading, the Apostle Paul commends the Corinthians for strengthening the testimony of Christ among themselves and assures them that spiritual gifts will prepare them for the day when Christ returns (*1 Corinthians 1:3-9*). In our Holy Gospel, Jesus encourages His followers to look forward to the day when He returns in power and glory to end all suffering (*Mark 13:24-37*).

How do we do this? We can see one answer but it goes by quickly. We may miss it. In the *Peanuts* comic strip by Charles Schulz, Charlie Brown is known for his striped shirt; Snoopy, for his doghouse; Linus, for his security blanket. Even though children occasionally poke fun at his blanket, the otherwise mature and thoughtful Linus refuses to give it up. In the TV special **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, Charlie Brown shouts, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" Linus says that he does. He walks to center stage and quotes from memory angels appearing to shepherds (*Luke 2:8-14*). We picture angels as beautiful and gentle. Yet people who see them in the Bible are frightened. The shepherds are "sore afraid." The moment Linus says, "Fear not," he drops his blanket. It goes by quickly. We may miss it. We need to realize what that means.

The birth of Jesus frees us from our fears. The birth of Jesus frees us from habits we are unwilling or unable to break. The birth of Jesus empowers us to drop false security we have been grasping so tightly and learn to trust and cling to Jesus instead. Jesus inspires us to seek true peace, true security. Jesus welcomes us: "Anyone who comes to Me I will not cast out" (*John 6:37*).

Thanks be to God. **Amen** Go in peace. Serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God**