

***In the Season of Lent, the Lord Jesus draws us to ponder and pray with him.
As Jesus gives his life for us in the outpouring of his Blood on the Cross,
Christ forgives our sins, heals us, and saves us from Satan's power.
He desires to give us a heart open to repentance, to free us from sin and death,
in order to lead us into the glorious embrace of his Father,
the eternal life of Resurrection with the Communion of Saints.***

BEFORE HIS BIRTH JESUS, THE MESSIAH, IS HERALDED AS THE ONE SENT BY GOD TO SET US FREE, TO FORGIVE OUR SINS, AND TO HEAL US

The Messiah was expected by the Jews to be a glorious King overcome all political enemies. However, God revealed through the prophets and the psalms that the Messiah would sacrifice his life to forgive our sins and enter death and conquer it by his Resurrection. ***“See my Servant will prosper, he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights.... And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried.... Yet he was pierced through for our faults and crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and by his wounds we are healed”*** (Isaiah 52:13, & 53:4-6)

At the Annunciation, the angel said to Mary, ***“Hail full of grace... Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call his Name JESUS... the Child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God”*** (Luke 1:28-34).

God also sent his angel to Joseph, betrothed to Mary to reveal to him his mission to be the husband of Mary and the foster father of her child: ***“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and his name shall be called ‘Emmanuel’ (which means, God is with us)”*** Matt 1:20-23).

After Mary consented to obey the Lord to be the Mother of Jesus, she hastened to visit her cousin Elizabeth who had conceived John who would be the precursor of Jesus in his mission. At the birth of John, his father Zachariah held his newly born son and praised God for fulfilling his promise in the birth of Jesus who is present there also in Mary's womb. Zachariah proclaimed in the well-known canticle prayed every morning in the

Liturgy of the Hours: *“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a Mighty Savior born of the House of David... And you, child [John], will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord [Jesus] to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace”* (Luke 1:68-79).

From these events in the Gospel the Father reveals to us that the very essence of our salvation is the forgiveness of our sins. Sin is the ultimate slavery that holds humanity captive and oppressed by darkness, fear, and eternal death. From his tender and merciful heart, the Father gives us to his eternal Son, to be born **in time** as the Son of Mary. The deepest desire of his fatherly heart is revealed in giving his Son the Name Jesus which means Savior. Jesus is to save us from what? Sin and death!... from whom, Satan! The name *“Emmanuel, God with us,”* reveals that Jesus is one **with us** in our human family through the humanity of Mary. His very presence of being **with us**, the power of his holiness dwelling in our sinful world, is the power of God is Jesus dwelling **with us** in our world of sin and death, to free us **who sit in darkness of sin and the shadow of death**.

**Jesus begins his mission of the Father by proclaiming
salvation by the forgiveness of sins.**

John heralds the ministry of Jesus by calling people to repentance by making them aware of how sin has enslaved them. *“The word of God came to John, the son of Zachariah, in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”* (Lk 3:3).

The Gospels reveal that Jesus begins his ministry in this spirit: *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel’”* (Matt 1:14). Again, Jesus stresses first and foremost: *“repentance” for the forgiveness of sins*. And immediately a few verses later in Mark’s Gospel Jesus is confronted by an unclean spirit who cries out, *“What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him saying, “Be silent and come out of him.” And the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him”* (Mark 1:24-16).

**In his ministry, Jesus forgives people of sin
and sets them free from bondage to Satan.**

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he said to the paralytic – ‘I say to you, rise, take up your mat and go home’” (Mark 2:10).

“I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little.’ And he said to the woman [bathing his feet in her tears], ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’” (Lk 7:47-50).

“The Pharisees and scribes murmured saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So Jesus told them this parable.” What follows are three parables of God’s mercy and forgiveness: 1) The Lost sheep, which ends with the words, ***“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who needs no repentance”***, 2) the Lost Coin, which ends; ***“I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*** And 3) the Prodigal Son which ends, ***“It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found”*** (Luke chapter 15).

Jesus invites himself to dine in the house of Zachaeus, the tax collector, and people complained, ***“He has gone in to be the guest of a sinner.”*** But Jesus concludes, ***“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”*** (Luke 19:1-10).

At the call of Matthew to be an apostle, the Pharisees again complain that he has gone to eat with sinners. In reply Jesus said, ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”*** (Matthew 9:11-13).

On the night before he died, Jesus seals a New Covenant in his Blood, and forms us into a new people of God in his Body and Blood.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said: Take and eat; this is my body’ Then he took a cup, gave it to them, saying ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you in the kingdom of my Father’” (Matthew 26:26-29).

Christ establishes a new bloodline to transform and the bloodline of Abraham and his children of the Old Covenant. Drinking Christ's Blood in faith transforms us to become his blood brothers and sisters and the people of his New Covenant.

Forgiveness is among the last words Jesus speaks on the Cross

“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Lk 23:33-43).

Jesus breathes the “Holy Spirit of Forgiveness” upon us within the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:19-23).

As the People of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus' Blood grew in numbers, and the Apostles and Disciples preached and wrote Letters and the Gospels, St. Peter repeats the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant by writing, **“By his wounds you were healed”** (1 Peter 2:24).