

the prophet Isaiah and the other prophets of the Old Testament of the bible. They dream of a promised experience of blessed and purpose-filled life. In the New Testament, we can hear the summons of John the Baptist who calls upon the people of his day and ours to prepare a way for God. With him, we hear the summons to make straight the way that leads to God. We put aside self-destructive attitudes and patterns of behaviour. They can so easily deceive and entrap us. We allow ourselves to be drawn into a new hope that is incarnated – made real and tangible – in the person of Jesus.

As he was a friend of Jesus, Saint Jude was also a friend of Mary. We will accompany Mary who became the mother of the Messiah in her resounding Yes to God's invitation to cooperate with the growth of divine life within her. As with Mary, so also with us, God will never force us into submissive compliance. Rather, God entices us, attracts us and shows us what the divine will can achieve in and through us... if only we follow with love. Advent is a time for allowing ourselves to be seduced by the God

who is passionate about the good of humanity, fervent with a will to transform human pain into divine joy.

Christmas

The central theme of Christmas always remains the same: God desires and chooses to make a home with us. The heart of our celebration is that God chose to live our human life so that we might find a way through Christ to live God's life. As an apostle, Saint Jude would never have tired in proclaiming this truth.

As we reflect on this fascinating mystery, many of us may look at beautifully presented Christmas crib scenes. At the centre is a baby gazing into his mother's eyes and finding security, reassurance and warmth in her attentive presence and caring embrace. The child draws out a truly self-forgetting, self-giving love. As we see the baby's mother, we perceive a tremendous woman of faith – not knowing the future, wondering and pondering how this new-born will develop and what this child will become. Yet ultimately and gently she accepts this wonderful gift from God whom she has experienced resonating in the core of her being. She knows God

to be faithful and true to the word spoken to her by a messenger nine months earlier.

This same word had been uttered for generations before her by inspired men and women. They were filled with a prophetic fire burning within them; they had felt the impulse of God resonating in their deepest centre. They had heard a gentle whispering that, when their hearts were stilled, became an overwhelming and compelling word to be received and to be shared. As Mary is drawn deeply into communion with divine life, she is energised by the Holy Spirit to accept the mission given her. Mary (Myriam of Nazareth) has expected, she has anticipated and now, with the birth of her son, her heart reverberates with God's own rejoicing. Somehow, she knows that this blessing from God is not just for her but for the whole of humanity.

I sometimes wonder if Joseph, Mary's husband, was disappointed that an outhouse was the best that could be provided in the circumstances for the birth of this mysterious son. However, somehow, he is lost in the beauty of the present moment and so keen

to do everything he can to ensure that *“all will be well, that all manner of things will be very well indeed”*. Like his wife, he will become teacher and protector, carer and provider. Without knowing the future, they will together discover in the one they form in the ways of humanity, the one who will shape humanity in the way of God.

Not a romantic Christmas

We could be rather romantic in our thinking about the first Christmas, but the scene is presented to awaken us to faith, to raise up a new hope and to stir what is most authentic within us to a new way of living and a deeper expression of practical loving.

The world at the time of Jesus' birth shared similarities with our own time. There was greed and exploitation; there were divides between rich and poor nations, wealthy and struggling people. Concerns about climate change was not on the agenda, but politicians and rulers moved from crisis to crisis – nothing new there! Vested interest covertly influenced local, national and world events. Wars were waged and children starved. While

COVID-19 was unheard of, disease afflicted many people, and the vulnerable, the marginalised and so very many refugees were the excluded ones. Not a particularly romantic situation into which to be born!

And yet, into this messy darkness God speaks (through the very concrete event of this birth) a divine, definitive, re-creative and hope-filled Word... and moves into action... but in a very unexpected, unconventional way: not through coercive force and power, but through attraction and seduction.

God answers our longing for more

God in the adult Jesus fascinates his hearers. They are those who follow him and those who find his Spirit resonating within them. It is as if God awakes, or rekindles, a fire that is dormant in the lives of those who encounter Jesus. They've been longing for more, they've been seeking relief, they ached in anticipation of more. In the person of Jesus, the More is among them, in their midst, concrete, tangible, real. We can see him, we can hear him, we can feel him.... He speaks our language! And he

speaks the language of God. The vulnerable defenceless baby grows, develops and becomes the very means by which pure divine love can really be experienced, shared and communicated. Divine empathy and human empathy in Jesus are completely in harmony.

The Carmelite poet John of the Cross said, *“Where there is no love, put love and you will draw out love”*. Wherever Jesus went, a passion for God and a passion for the good of humanity was given expression. He gave a new spiritual energy to all who accepted him as the revelation of God. Not far away and distant, but present and immersed in their actual lives. Because Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, comes from the very heart of God (the very heart of Love), those who experienced him also experienced the tenderness, acceptance, healing and forgiveness of a God who never gives up on a single human person. God never gives up. Love is relentless. A fire never to be quenched.

True love, of its nature, releases that which binds people. Love sets people free to be the persons that they really can be. It affirms the goodness, beauty and

truth and the value of the human person and enables real growth.

Thank You

Here at the Shrine of Saint Jude, we often read or hear of people's tremendous confidence in his inspiration and intercession. It is wonderful when we come to know about how his friends have come to a greater awareness of God's action in their lives through their prayer. On behalf of the Carmelites in this country, I thank you for your commitment to hope-filled living. We are also incredibly indebted to you for your generous donations, which enable us to continue being of service at home and abroad. Our pledge at

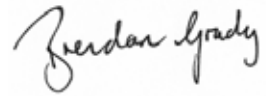
the Shrine of Saint Jude is that we will remember you and your loved ones in our hearts every day when we pray.

We wish you a hope-filled and blessed Christmas and offer this simple prayer that you might like to use as a journey through Advent to Christmas... and beyond.

A Prayer

Look deeply within me, LO loving tender-hearted God and help me to see what you see. Help me to see the beauty with which you have created me. Enable me to experience the goodness that you have implanted in my heart. Inspire me to unveil and to discover the truth that will

set me free. But, loving God, show me that beauty and goodness and truth not only in the tiny Christ-child, but in those around me. Help me to make love concrete. Reshape our human horizons so that we may come to experience what you experience, and to become so in harmony with your love that we become channels of love to others. Where there is no love, inspire us to put love, and with you alive in us, may we draw out love... this Christmas.



Brendan Grady, O.Carm.
Prior Provincial



 Carmelite Friars, PO Box 289, Faversham, ME13 3BZ

 01795 539 214

 newsletter@stjudeshrine.org.uk

 www.stjudeshrine.org.uk

Donate online: <https://stjudeshrine.co.uk/donation>

Online shop: <http://tinyurl.com/SaintJudeShop>



Registered Charity: No. 1061342



Dear Friend of Saint Jude

Greetings and heartfelt prayer from the Shrine of St. Jude in Faversham, where from 28 to 31 October Carmelite friars, Shrine Office staff, volunteers and local parishioners were so happy to welcome pilgrims for this great apostle's feast day celebrations. Spread over the few days, the spirit of prayer, communion and pilgrimage provided ample evidence that hope in the face of adversity is truly alive in the hearts of St. Jude's friends. We thank all those who were able to join us in person, so many who participated in the online Novena leading up to the feast and those who were united in prayer with us at home.

Preparing to receive Life

During the month of November, we have been praying for all those

who have gone before us on their journey towards the Light. Remembering all who have died, especially during this chapter in human history because of Covid-19, we move forward with the faith that our good and generous God desires nothing other than to embrace us with divine tenderness, not only at the end of our earthly pilgrimage but even now in our daily living. God prepares willing and open hearts to become completely open to and transformed by the gift of life in all its fullness.

We can only imagine the joy of heaven that awaits those who are purified by Love itself who beckons, draws into intimacy and fulfils authentic human desire. Because of the vision of life in God that St. Jude received from Jesus, he

was willing not only to share and proclaim the good news of God's real presence among us in Christ, but also to experience physical martyrdom for the sake of his Gospel. Such sacrifice is only possible when there is profound experience and great love.

Advent Longing

On 28 November we entered the season of Advent, a time of preparation for intensifying our sense of desire for the touch of God. During Advent we become awakened and alert to the signs of this divine approach. This season helps us to welcome God anew in the birth of Christ at Christmas.

Over the four weeks of Advent, we might wish to read or listen to the hopes of aching hearts in