

THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

The Road to Bethlehem: Daily Meditations for Advent and Christmas © 2023
TAN Books

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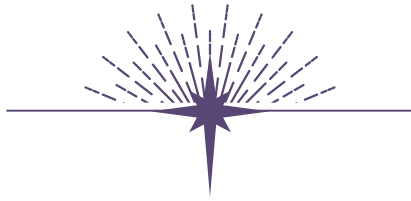
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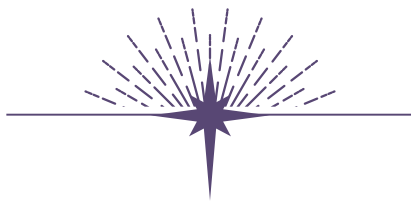
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Saint Alphonsus de Liguori (1696–1787) was an Italian Catholic bishop, spiritual writer, composer, musician, artist, poet, lawyer, scholastic philosopher, and theologian. He also founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, known as the Redemptorists, in 1732. He was one of the most prolific writers in the history of the Catholic Church and later became a doctor of the Church, the patron of moral theologians. He wrote this little work in 1750. Because of his infirmities and various duties as a bishop, this work was not published until 1758. TAN Books is pleased to present this book, *The Road to Bethlehem: Daily Meditations for Advent and Christmas*, from the original book entitled *The Incarnation, Birth, and Infancy; or, the Mysteries of the Faith*.

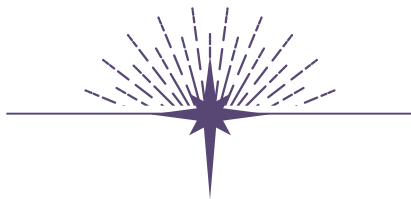
Few saints have written with such passion, depth, and simplicity on Christ, Our Lady, and the mysteries of our Faith, such as the incarnation and nativity of Christ, as Saint Alphonsus Liguori. TAN Books is pleased to present this little work for the first time to join several other TAN works by St. Alphonsus,

such as *The Glories of Mary*, *Preparation for Death*, and *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*.

May you, dear reader, prepare your heart for the coming of the Messiah through these beautiful daily Advent and Christmas meditations. The road to Bethlehem begins and ends with prayer.

The Publisher





MEDITATION I: FIRST SUNDAY

GOODNESS OF GOD IN THE WORK OF THE REDEMPTION

“And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost, and was made man.”

—*Symbol. Const.*

Consider that God, having created the first man, in order that he might serve Him and love Him in this life, and be conducted afterwards to reign with Him forever in paradise, enriched him for this end with knowledge and grace. But ungrateful man rebelled against God, refusing Him the obedience which he owed Him in justice and gratitude; and thus, miserable sinner, was he left with all his posterity as a rebel, deprived of divine grace, and forever excluded from paradise. Behold, then, after this ruin, caused by sin, all men lost! All were living in blindness, or in the darkness of the shadow of death. The devil

had dominion over them, and hell destroyed innumerable victims amongst them.

But God, seeing men reduced to this miserable state, was moved with pity, and resolved to save them. And how? He did not send an angel, a seraph; but to show to the world the immense love that He bore to these ungrateful worms, *He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.*¹ He sent His own Son to become man, and to clothe Himself with the same flesh as sinful men, in order that, by His suffering and death, He might satisfy the divine justice for their crimes, and thus deliver them from eternal death; and, reconciling them with His divine Father, might obtain for them divine grace, and might render them worthy to enter into life eternal.

Consider, on the one hand, the immense ruin that sin brings upon souls, as it deprives them of the friendship of God and of paradise, and condemns them to an eternity of pain. And, on the other hand, consider the infinite love which God showed in this great work of the incarnation of the Word, causing His only-begotten Son to sacrifice His divine life by the hands of executioners on a cross, in a sea of sorrows and of infamy, to obtain for us pardon and life eternal. Oh, in contemplating this great mystery and this excess of divine love, how can we do otherwise than exclaim: O infinite goodness, O infinite mercy, O infinite love, for a God to become man, and to die for me!

¹ Rom. 8:3.

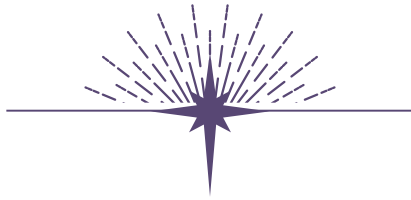
AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

But how is it my Jesus, that after You have repaired this ruin of sin by Your own death, I have so often willfully renewed it again by the many offenses I have committed against You? You have saved me at so great a cost, and I have so often chosen to damn myself, in losing You, O infinite Good! But what You have said gives me confidence that when the sinner who has turned his back upon You is converted to You, You will not refuse to embrace him: *Turn ye to Me, and I will turn to you.*² You have also said, *If any man shall . . . open to Me the door, I will come in to him.*³ Behold, Lord, I am one of these rebels, an ungrateful traitor, who have often turned my back upon You, and driven You from my soul; but now I repent with all my heart for having thus ill-used You and despised Your grace; I repent of it, and love You above everything. Behold, the door of my heart is already open; enter, but enter never to leave it again. I know well that You will never leave me, if I do not again drive You away; but this is my fear, and this is the grace which I ask of You, and which I hope always to ask; let me die rather than be guilty of this fresh and still greater ingratitude. My dearest Redeemer, I do not deserve to love You, after all the offenses that I have committed against You; but for Your own merits' sake I ask of You the gift of Your holy love, and therefore I beseech You make me know the great good

² Zach. 1:3.

³ Apoc. 3:20.

You are, the love You have borne me, and how much You have done to oblige me to love You. Ah, my God and Savior, let me no longer live ungrateful to Your great goodness. My Jesus, I will never leave You again; I have already offended You enough. It is only right that I should employ the remaining years of my life in loving You and pleasing You. My Jesus, my Jesus, help me; help a sinner that wishes to love You. O Mary, my Mother, you have all power with Jesus, seeing you are His Mother; beg of Him to forgive me; beg of Him to enchain me with His holy love. You are my hope; in you do I confide.



MEDITATION 2: FIRST MONDAY

GRANDEUR OF THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

“And the Word was made flesh.”

—*John 1:14*

Our Lord sent Saint Augustine to write upon the heart of Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi the words, *And the Word was made flesh*. Oh, let us also pray the Lord to enlighten our minds, and to make us understand what an excess and what a miracle of love this is, that the eternal Word, the Son of God, should have become man for the love of us.

The holy Church is struck with awe at the contemplation of this great mystery: *I considered Your works and was afraid*.⁴ If God had created a thousand other worlds, a thousand times

⁴ *In Circ. Dom. resp. 6.*

greater and more beautiful than the present, it is certain that this work would be infinitely less grand than the incarnation of the Word: *He hath showed might in His arm.*⁵ To execute the great work of the Incarnation, it required all the omnipotence and infinite wisdom of God, in order to unite human nature to a divine person, and that a divine person should so humble Himself as to take upon Himself human nature. Thus God became man, and man became God; and hence, the divinity of the Word being united to the soul and body of Jesus Christ, all the actions of this Man-God became divine: His prayers were divine, His sufferings divine, His infant cries divine, His tears divine, His steps divine, His members divine, His very blood divine, which became, as it were, a fountain of health to wash out all our sins, and a sacrifice of infinite value to appease the justice of the Father, who was justly offended with men.

And who, then, are these men? Miserable, ungrateful, and rebellious creatures. And yet for these God becomes man; subjects himself to human miseries; suffers and dies to save these unworthy sinners: *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*⁶ O holy faith! If faith did not assure us of it, who would believe that a God of infinite majesty should abase Himself so far as to become a worm like us, in order to save us at the cost of so much suffering and disgrace, and of so cruel and shameful a death?

⁵ Luke 1:51.

⁶ Phil. 2:8.

“O grace! O power of love!” cries St. Bernard. O grace, which men could not even have imagined, if God Himself had not thought of granting it to us! O divine love, which can never be fathomed! O mercy! O infinite charity, worthy only of an infinite bounty!

AFFECTIONS AND PRAYERS

O soul, O body, O blood of my Jesus! I adore you and thank you; you are my hope; you are the price paid to save me from hell, which I have so often merited. O my God, what a miserable and hopeless life would await me in eternity, if You, my Redeemer, had not thought of saving me by Your sufferings and death! But how is it that souls, redeemed by You with so much love, knowing all this, can live without loving You, and can despise the grace which You have acquired for them with so much suffering? And did not I also know all this? How, then, could I offend You, and offend You so often? But, I repeat it, Your blood is my hope. I acknowledge, my Savior, the great injuries that I have done to You. Oh that I had rather died a thousand times! Oh that I had always loved You! But I thank You that You yet give me time to do so. I hope in the time that remains to me in this life, and for all eternity, to sing forever Your praises for the mercies You have shown me. I have deserved, on account of my sins, to be more and more in darkness; but You have given me more and more light. I deserved that You should abandon me; but You,

with calls still more loving, came to me and sought me. I deserve that my soul should remain more hardened; but You have softened and touched it with compunction, so that by Your grace I now feel great sorrow for the offenses that I have committed against You; I feel within me an ardent desire of loving You; I feel fully resolved to lose everything rather than Your friendship; I feel a love towards You that makes me abhor everything that displeases You. And this sorrow, this desire, this resolution, and this love, who is it that gives them to me? It is You, O Lord, in Your great mercy. Therefore, my Jesus, this is a proof that You have pardoned me; it is a proof that You now love me, and that You will me at all costs to be saved; You will that I should be saved, and I will save myself principally to give You pleasure. You love me, and I also love You; but my love is but little. Oh, give me more love; You deserve more love from me, for I have received from You more special favors than others; I pray You, increase the flames of my love. Most holy Mary, obtain for me that the love of Jesus may consume and destroy in me every affection that has not God for its object. You listen to the prayers of all that call on you; listen to me also, obtain for me love and perseverance.