

IMPRINT

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A THRILL *of* HOPE

The weary soul rejoices

For yonder breaks

A new and glorious morn

Fall on your knees

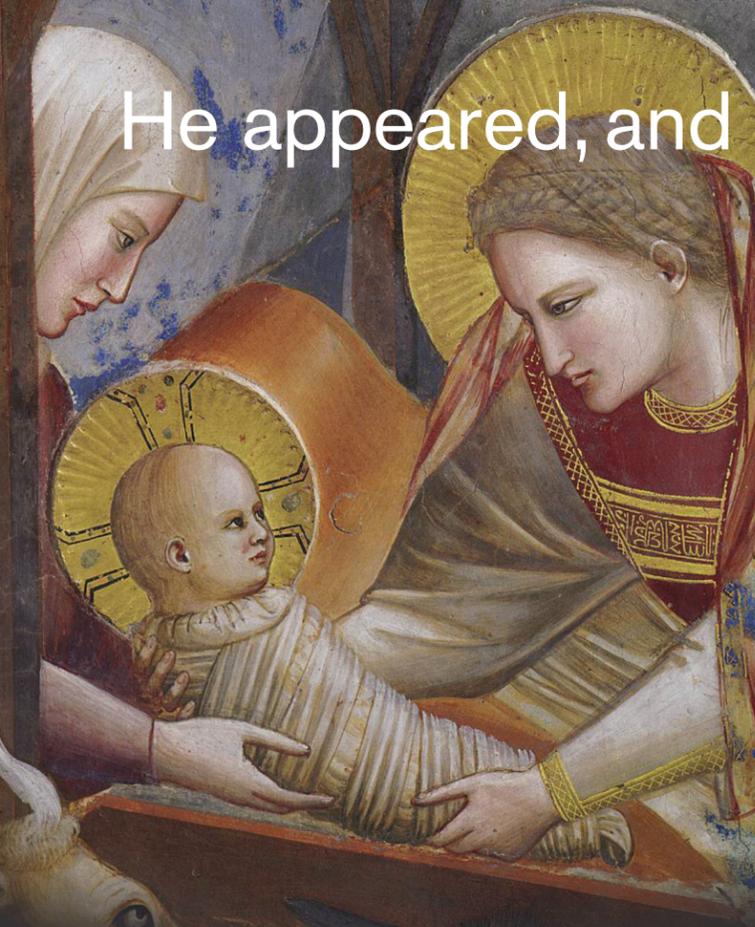
O hear the angel voices

O night divine

O night when Christ was born

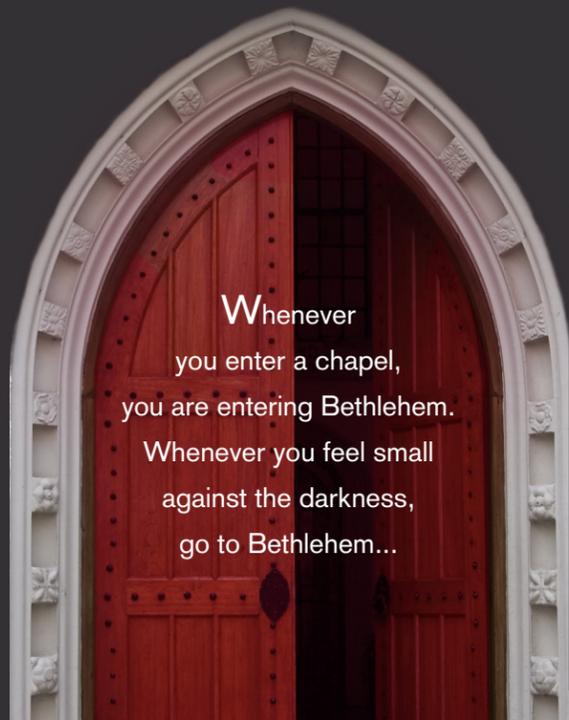
O night divine





He appeared, and the soul felt its worth.

Don't be afraid.
Don't run away.
Come.



Whenever
you enter a chapel,
you are entering Bethlehem.
Whenever you feel small
against the darkness,
go to Bethlehem...

the soul felt its worth.

Our Sister's nephew was celebrating his third birthday. His dad had bought what he thought was his son's favorite ice cream. Little Gus took a big bite. His face twisted in puzzlement. "It's not what I expected," he muttered. His aunt, not wanting her brother to be hurt, gently offered, "It's better than what you expected, isn't it?" Gus's face lit up. "It's better than I expected!" he exclaimed, delighted. "It's better than I expected!"

The Incarnation – God become man – is something better than we ever expected. At Christmas, the invisible world breaks into the visible. The hosts of angels thrill all of creation by acclaiming a surprising reality, a reality no one dared to hope for: God is with us. Emmanuel. For real.

Jesus fills everything with light and hope. Everything matters. You matter. I matter. Our struggles and joys matter. As the Christmas classic proclaims: "He appeared, and the soul felt its worth." Because of Him, as the poet Rev. John Duffy wrote, "nothing would again be casual or small, but everything with light invested." In Christ, we know that we are not alone, and that fear and darkness are not the end of the story. Our founder, Cardinal O'Connor, once said, "There's only one answer to fear. That answer is in Bethlehem. That answer is in a little baby. That answer is in that Child about whom the angel sang, 'Don't be afraid. Don't run away. Come.'" (*Christmas Midnight Mass, 1989*)

Our hope rests entirely in this Child, who sees us and loves us with all the fullness of His infinite heart, and who desires to give us a love far beyond our expectations. Because of Him, our hearts "thrill with hope", "our weary world rejoices", and our fears are transformed.

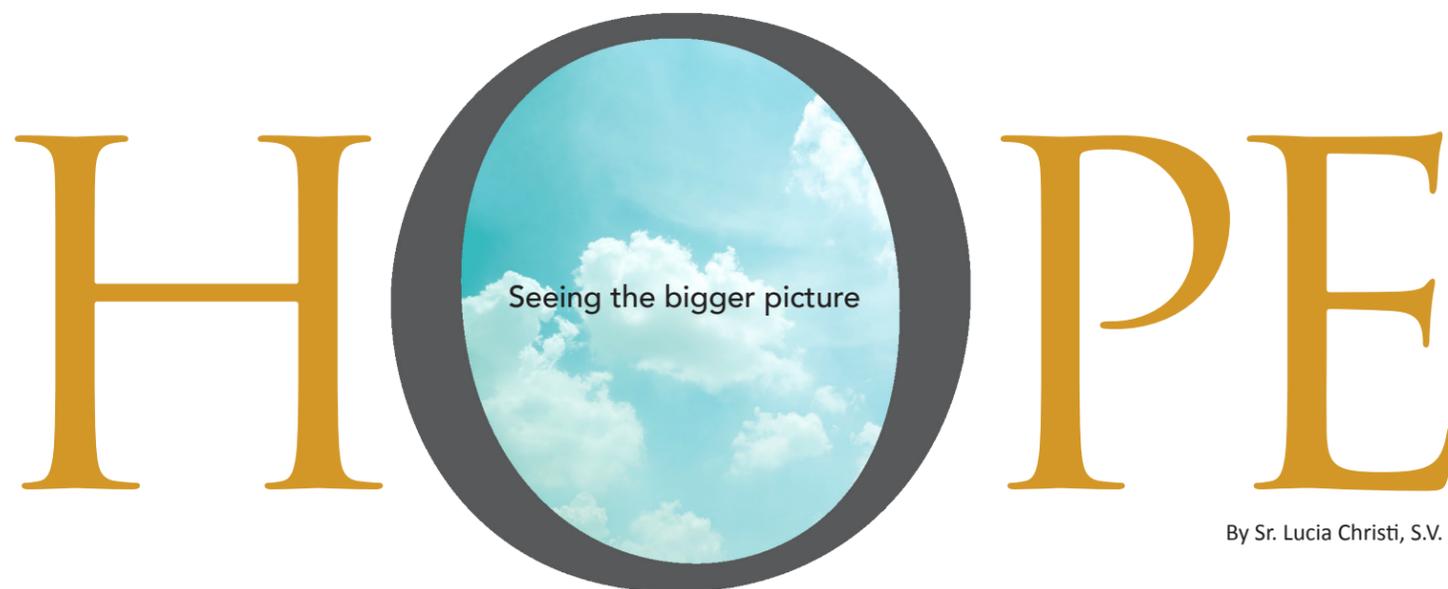
When we feel small against the darkness, we can remember the "hope [that] does not disappoint us" (*Rom 5:5*): that fact that Jesus was smaller still. Let us follow the example of the shepherds and "go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened" (*Lk 2:15*). Whenever we enter a church or chapel, we are entering Bethlehem. He awaits us in the tabernacle, smaller even than when He lay in the manger, waiting to speak to our hearts: "Do not be afraid. I am with you." Let us rest in His promise that He will not leave us orphans. Let us stake our lives on it.

In a time when there is much confusion in our Church and our world, let us, with Mary, turn our faces to the face of the Little One who gazes up at us from the straw of the manger, who will one day gaze down at us from the wood of the Cross. **Let us adore Him who is our hope, whose light no darkness can overcome.**

Know that you and your family are very much in our prayers this Christmas.

In Christ, Our Life and Our Hope,

Mother Agnes Mary, SV
Mother Agnes Mary, SV



By Sr. Lucia Christi, S.V.

Let's face it: looking around at the world today, it can be difficult to find the light shining in the midst of what seems to be a lot of darkness. Our spirits won't be lifted by turning on the nightly news or reading the paper, and it's easy to be consumed by the anxieties and daily struggles of family life, especially when faced with illnesses, unemployment, and so many other burdens. While our culture would have us turn to distractions or self-medicating activities that make many promises but don't actually deliver, our faith holds up another way.

Seeing the bigger picture.

Hope opens our eyes to see the deeper reality of life: to know that this passing world is not the end, because we were made for heaven! It means living with our gaze fixed on the promise of eternal life, which radically changes how we see the present moment. It means standing in confident expectation of the Father's blessing (*cf. CCC 2090*).

TIP: Shift your horizon. When I am disappointed, I can ask, "How will this appear in the light of eternity?" I can lift my gaze to the reality of God's infinite love for me and His desire to be with me in heaven forever.

God is real. And that changes everything.

St. Paul describes hope as living with God in the world (*cf. Eph 2:12*). Living in hope means choosing to find Jesus – the God who came to us as a tiny babe in Bethlehem – and continuing to bring light into the darkness of our world each day. In a culture in which so many people have everything they need and more, God can seem irrelevant. But hope totally contradicts that way of thinking, it says, "God is real, and He is here. And that matters – in fact, it changes everything". He is alive and present, even in the midst of darkness and suffering. And He is drawing us to more, even in the midst of comfort and security in material things.

TIP: Make an act of faith. "Jesus, I believe that You are here with me now. I believe that You see me, and that You are working all things for my good."

Not placing limits on God's generosity.

So often, we place limits on God by asking too little from Him! But Christmas reminds us that He wants to give us everything, because He wants to give us Himself. Our desire for heaven, for God, is fed by hope and leads to greater hope. St. Thérèse of Lisieux encouraged us: "We can never have too much confidence in the good God who is so powerful and so merciful. We obtain from Him as much as we hope for."

TIP: Remember your blessings. Take a minute every day to thank the Lord for everything He's given you.

A hope that trusts in His goodness.

The truth is, hoping for much from God takes courage. It is tempting to live our lives constantly grasping for control; it feels safer to cling to what we can acquire, fix, or produce. But actual Christian hope takes risk. It means daring to hope in the goodness of the Father. It means believing in who He is and what He says, most especially through His Son – plac-



istock: Siphotography / Vudhikul Ochareoen

ing our trust not in ourselves, but in Someone else. And that can be scary! Because of this, hope is a radical witness to those around us.

TIP: Re-focus. When I find myself feeling disappointed or discouraged, I can ask myself, “Where did I place my hope? Was it in my own ideas, plans, or possible outcomes? Or was in Jesus Christ?”

Remembering the dawn: Look to the saints.

In a world desperately longing for hope and not knowing where to find it, we have much to offer those around us. Pope St. John Paul II once said, “Just when night engulfs us, we must think about dawn coming; we must believe that every morning, the Church is revived through her saints.” We look to the saints that have gone before us to teach us to live in hope, and we also recognize that we are called to join them here and now!

TIP: Remember: you are not alone.

The saints struggled, too, and Jesus worked wonders in their lives.

He believes in you. Let Him in.

You are called to be the next saint that will revive the Church and the world. By giving God permission to be God in your life, by receiving the grace and new life He wants to give you and letting Him draw you closer to heaven each day, you will be a beacon of light in the world. And the hope that was born at Christmas will continue to grow in human hearts until the promise of eternal life is realized. So take courage! Be not afraid. Give Him permission.

TIP: Practice and pray. When I find myself cast about by the storms of life, I can make an act of hope and pray: “Lord, I accept, I offer, I surrender myself to Your hands because You are my loving Father.”

Jesus loves when we ask Him for what we need.

PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS

Jesus, I open my heart to receive the graces You want to give me this Christmas. I ask You to come into my life in a new and powerful way. Please forgive me for all the ways I have resisted Your love. I surrender to You all of my desires, relationships, and circumstances. Jesus, let Your Light shine in me. I place my hope in You. Amen.



istock: YouaraPechkin

istock: Misha Kaminsky

THE SAINTS ARE GOD'S TRUE CONSTELLATIONS

We can look to the saints for hope. The saints know the ins and outs of the human experience – the nitty gritty and the glorious. The saints are ordinary people who opened themselves extraordinarily to the power of Christmas – to the power of Jesus becoming human and taking upon Himself our sins. There is nothing in our past that is not part of His plan for our future. We may feel helpless at times – overwhelmed by our own failures, by difficult situations with our family and friends, or by our circumstances. But there is nothing that is beyond His mercy, and the saints show us that.

The Lord wants to do something big for you this Christmas, something bigger than just gifts and carols and figgy pudding. We don't have to get so wrapped up in all the details. Let's anticipate the real graces He wants to give us. He wants to step into our hearts and into our families in a new way this year. Let's let Him.

Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur ▶ was a French woman who struggled in her marriage with her militant atheist husband, Felix. After she died, Felix read her spiritual journals and was so moved that he converted to Catholicism and became a priest.



Blessed Bartolo Longo was an Italian lawyer who became a satanic priest. He struggled deeply with mental illness, paranoia, depression, and anxiety, and it was only after the intervention of concerned friends that he decided to return to the Church. He spent the rest of his life promoting the Rosary.



Blessed Margaret of Costello was an Italian woman born with severe disabilities and health issues. She suffered the pain of being rejected, mistreated, and forgotten by her family. Instead of harboring resentment, she gave her life to Christ and dedicated her time to the poor and suffering.

Venerable Matt Talbot was a poor, single, Irish workman who struggled with alcoholism. The emptiness of his life and friendships caused him to take a pledge to refrain from alcohol and to return to the Sacraments.



St. Mary of Egypt was an Egyptian woman who worked as a prostitute and struggled with deep sexual addiction. After meeting a group of pilgrims headed for Jerusalem, she powerfully experienced the Blessed Mother's intercession and decided to give her life to Christ, choosing to battle temptations to unchastity.



St. Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan. She was kidnapped at age seven, abused, and sold into slavery. She eventually encountered Christianity, forgave her captors, gained her freedom, and became a religious Sister.



Servant of God Dorothy Day was an American journalist and social activist, who suffered much from love affairs, a broken marriage, a suicide attempt, and an abortion. Her love for the poor led her to encounter the love of Jesus in His Church, and she ended up becoming Catholic and founding the Catholic Worker Movement.



St. Francis de Sales was a French priest who struggled for years with anger issues. Even though he never lost his fiery nature, he was eventually so successful in controlling his temper that he became known for his gentleness.



“The saints are God's true constellations, which light up the nights of this world, serving as our guides. If you live with Christ... then you too... will become stars which go before men and women, pointing out to them the right path in life.”

-Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Holy men and women pray for us!

Our Precious

OSCARITO

Hope is more than an optimistic way of thinking.

Optimism lacks the traction our hearts need in the face of tragedies. It leaves us easily defeated when our plans or ideas are frustrated. Hope is different. Hope is not only a psychological force, but a theological virtue that is infused into our souls at Baptism. It says, "Yes, there is suffering. Yes, there are things I cannot comprehend. But despite it all, I will live with the conviction that a good and loving God is guiding the universe and all things in it." We can say, with St. Julian of Norwich, "yes, all will be well." With hope, we can actually live our lives in a way where our peace and happiness are not determined by our circumstances.

by Sr. Fidelity Grace, S.V. and Sr. Marie Veritas, S.V.



AN INTERVIEW with Mildred and Oscar

And then I heard a voice in my heart say, "You can find another way."

...And I felt this enormous hope inside of me.

Can you share your story with us?

Mildred: Oscar and I were expecting our fourth baby – a boy. We were so excited. But when I was 20 weeks along in my pregnancy, the doctors told me that I had a very serious condition, one that was potentially life-threatening. They told me I should have an abortion.

That sounds like it was a huge shock.

Mildred: I was so afraid and confused. I started crying and crying. I didn't want to die. I didn't want my baby to die. Everyone was scared. Everybody thought that I should have the abortion. And then I heard a voice in my heart say, "You can find another way." I felt this enormous force, this enormous hope inside of me.

What did you do with this hope in your heart?

Mildred: I had faith. I wanted to find another way. And I knew that other way was God. My strength is from Him. I told my husband, "I need to see a priest." And Oscar took my hands and said, "I am with you. I will go with you. If you trust in God, I trust in God." The next day,

we went to the church and told Father Germain everything. And he said, "Trust God. He will make good for you." And he connected us with the Sisters of Life. The Sisters helped me find another doctor, a specialist, who spoke to me on the phone. They walked with me through my pregnancy.

How did you approach the birth of your baby?

Mildred: I prayed to God a lot. I said, "I want to stay strong for my family. Please, God. You know me. You know my heart." And I prayed to St. Gianna Molla, who had had a high-risk pregnancy, too, and gave her life for her child. I suffered a lot because I really didn't know what would happen. I prepared myself that I might die. I was ready to give my life for my baby. But I also had this internal force, this hope, that everything would be ok. Whatever happened, I was in God's hands.

What happened on the day of your delivery?

Mildred: On the day of my delivery, the Sisters came with my husband and me to the hospital. They sprinkled me with holy water and gave me an image of the Divine Mercy. I remember looking around at all the doctors in the room and praying, "Please, God. Hold the hands of everyone who will be operating on me. I trust in You." For the whole seven hours of the C-section surgery, I sang a little song I liked: "Give me today the healing promised in Your Word. I need Your love. Give me back hope. Fill me with Your Spirit..."

(Continued on next page)



Our son, Oscarito Leonardo, was born at 30 weeks, at five and a half pounds. They didn't have to give him any extraordinary care, like they thought; the only thing he needed was an incubator! And nothing happened to me. It was a miracle! I opened my eyes at the end of the surgery and saw myself covered in a white sheet, and I said, "Oh, I'm dead." But then I looked and saw Sr. Maria Cristina smiling at me. "Mildred, you are very alive!" she said.

What happened after the surgery?

Mildred: The doctors scheduled two follow-up surgeries after the birth, which they expected to be difficult. But the second surgery went really well, and when I went in for the third surgery, the doctors found that I didn't need surgery after all. It was another miracle!

When you look back, how do you see God at work?

Mildred: When I look back at what happened, I'm amazed. I'm like, "Who is this Mildred? I don't know who this woman is. I couldn't be that strong!" But nothing is impossible for God. If you trust in God, nothing is impossible. God was with me. He protected me. He gave me a new mind, a new body. He gave me peace. He gave me everything.

How has this experience changed your marriage and family?

Mildred: This experience brought us closer as a couple...it brought more love, more understanding. I think that if this had not happened to me, I would not have the love I do now. I look at life very different now. Before, life was good in a different way. I would go to parties, go to church every couple of weeks, go

with my family to places. But now, God is everything for us. Now I have more peace, more love. I am a better mom, a better wife, a better friend. Everything has changed.

Oscar: I feel like it's been a rebirth for everybody. We used to be so selfish, without giving God even a moment. I didn't like to go to church. But now, we can't live without God. Our daughters are also going to church, and they love it. That is hope. We didn't have that before. Now, we are even helping other people. The priest at the parish will send us other couples who are having problems, and we share with them our story. We are helping more sheep come to the Shepherd.

What advice would you give others about hoping in God?

Mildred: If you don't hope in God, you don't have anything. Hope first in God, and then everything is yours.

Oscar: But you have to be constant. Pray and wait. God has to be before anything else. It's like having a light in the darkness; you have to put the light before you so it guides you and shows you the path. It's not easy. Jesus doesn't say that following Him is easy. He suffered, and we suffer, too. In the beginning, I didn't have faith that God would protect Mildred. Before I began to pray, I saw it (the pregnancy) as a risk. But we began to pray and trust. And now I say, "With God, nothing is impossible."

What is your outlook on life?

Mildred: You know, now I enjoy my life. I am very happy, very blessed. I feel like this happened to me for a reason. God had something for me in this. I love my kids with all my heart. I give my life for each one. They are God's gift to me – a blessing. I always say, "Thanks, God! Thanks for everything. Thanks for blessing me. Thanks for even giving this Cross to me, because You are loving me in it."



The music festival came. Anticipation was high...and then...



HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

It was the dream of a lifetime...and Peter Cropper, a distinguished British concert violinist, couldn't resist. The Royal Academy of Music, as a special honor for his achievements, had offered to loan Peter a 258-year-old Stradivarius violin to play at a prestigious music festival in Finland. Handmade by the famed Antonio Stradivari, assembled from over 70 pieces of different types of wood, this Stradivarius violin was considered one of the most valuable in the world.

The music festival came. Anticipation was high. But as Peter walked on the stage, he tripped and fell...right on top of the violin. It was crushed. The neck snapped entirely off and the body cracked. It was an absolute disaster. Or so he thought.

A master craftsman heard of the incident and contacted Peter. He offered to repair the violin. The Royal Academy of Music agreed, with hesitation. Everybody knew that a broken Stradivarius couldn't be repaired. But after a month of labor, against all expectations, Peter received a call. The violin was ready, the craftsman said. Peter arrived at the shop, nervous. But when he looked at the instrument, he was filled with astonishment. It was perfect. He couldn't tell that it had ever been broken. And when he lifted it to his shoulder to play it, its sound was superb; in fact, it was more resonant and beautiful than it was before the accident. By the hands of the master craftsman, the broken Stradivarius was made glorious, better than if it hadn't broken at all. And its music ended up reaching farther than had originally been intended: Peter Cropper played it on his first American tour, debuting it in the famed Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Jesus wants to make all things new in your life, not just once, or twice, but every day. When everything seems lost, don't lose hope. Through His Cross and Resurrection, Jesus, the Master Craftsman, can take what seems like a disaster and turn it into glory. Let us run to Him with our weakness, failures, disappointments, and sins, especially in the Sacrament of Confession, which is the sacrament of hope. Let us let Him create a newness in us.





NEW HOPE! Meet our new postulants

Back row (left to right): Lauren, Sarah, Marie, Ali **Front row** (left to right): Nancy, Jenny, Sharon, Katie

We had the joy of receiving eight young women into our community as postulants on Sept. 8, 2018!

Jenny
Age: 29
Hometown: Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany
Study: Pediatric nursing
Interests: Traveling, exploring the beauty of nature, making fancy cakes, reading.
If you had a spiritual motto: There's no greater love than the most Holy Cross; let this love transform your heart!

Sarah
Age: 26
Hometown: Brownsville, Texas
Study: Speech Language Pathology
Interests: Baking, reading, writing/singing, playing guitar, my family, my dog, running.
If you had a spiritual motto: Our Father is the King of the cosmos; let Him love you.

Sharon
Age: 26
Hometown: Slidell, Louisiana
Study: Psychology
Interests: Camping/hiking, sports, playing and listening to music, reading, and writing.
If you had a spiritual motto: Behold, He comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills (*Song 2:8*).

Lauren
Age: 25
Hometown: Fort Worth, Texas
Study: Psychology and Theology
Interests: My wonderful family and friends, hiking, reading, dancing, baking, and ducks!
If you had a spiritual motto: With Mary, Our Mother, I pray: "Come, Lord Jesus Christ. You are welcome here!"

Katie
Age: 24
Hometown: Ann Arbor, Michigan
Study: Communications, Marketing, and Nonprofit Administration
Interests: Remembering birthdays, kayaking, JPII, smoothies, musicals, ferns, my ten siblings.
If you had a spiritual motto: Remember your Baptism!

Marie
Age: 24
Hometown: Lincoln, Nebraska
Study: History
Interests: Art, books, coffee, and outdoor adventures!
If you had a spiritual motto: Duc in altum! (Set out into the deep!)

Ali
Age: 23
Hometown: Lafayette, Louisiana
Study: Business
Interests: To travel, read, drink coffee, spend quality time with friends, and be outdoors!
If you had a spiritual motto: Let yourself wonder at the beauty and depth of God's designs!

Nancy
Age: 22
Hometown: Toowoomba, Australia
Study: Journalism
Interests: Classical/folk/gypsy music, anything humorous, and snacks.
If you had a spiritual motto: Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me.



HE CAME FOR YOU.

"I found hope the day I was able to give all my broken pieces to the Lord."

-Patricia

HOPE & HEALING



after abortion

REFLECTIONS

from women who have experienced healing after abortion through our Hope & Healing Mission.

"I found hope the day I was able to give all my broken pieces to the Lord – all the shame I had been holding onto for so many years. He replaced all those fears, doubts, and sins with His merciful love. I found hope though my children in heaven, who didn't want me to live in fear or to suffer anymore. I found Life in the Lord Jesus...He was with me all along." - Patricia

"Every time I read the promises of God in the Bible, I find hope. And once I made my first-ever confession at age 55, I was set free and healed, peacefully. Hope is very liberating." - Maria

"Hope is the assurance that He will use all for good – our pain, our suffering, our darkness, our mistakes, our fear and anxiety. In difficult times, I imagine clinging to Him with all my strength. It has helped me to take my crucifix off the wall and hold onto it during my prayer time. He wants only good things for me and for those I love." - Xavier

ALL ABOUT GABBIE

Hi, I'm Gabbie Rehder. I love reading, laughing, and writing. I also love funny stories and hearing other people laugh. I love the simplicity of daisies and the beauty and smell of roses. I love potatoes! (And not just because I am from Idaho.) Sky blue has always been my favorite color, but I also love the color red, which makes me think of the Passion and heart of Jesus. I work with, serve lunch to, and visit the senior citizens in my community. My heart is moved and full of love for those I am privileged to serve. And there is nothing I enjoy more than being with my family in our home overlooking the prairie. I also love sharing my humor, heart, and love for Jesus in my blogs. (www.gabberdella.blogspot.com)

Anchored

IN THE HEART OF GOD

Gabbie's Story

When I was twelve years old, I noticed that my left eye started to droop and my energy began to decline. I was sleeping 12 hours a night and taking three- to four-hour-long naps a day. I went to several doctors to determine what was going on. I was diagnosed with Kearns-Sayre Syndrome (KSS). KSS is a mitochondrial disease that affects my eyes, height, muscles, energy, and heart. My teenage years were difficult as I battled the burden of not being like everyone else. It was overwhelming.

I told my mom I wanted to go to Lourdes, France, to be healed. Lourdes is where Our Lady, under the title the Immaculate Conception, appeared to St. Bernadette in the year 1858. Many who pilgrimage there have been healed in the miraculous spring.

Our family of seven journeyed to France; however, I did not receive the instant healing I wanted. So much effort went into getting our family there, that I felt like I let everyone down when I was not physically healed. I was bitter and heart-broken. I thought God didn't want me to be healed.

I tried giving Him the silent treatment. I took down all of my holy images of Jesus and stopped praying. I went to church with my family and prayed before meals, but I felt nothing. The way I saw it, God didn't love me enough to heal me – to heal me how I wanted to be healed. I entered a dark place in my life, telling myself I was hopeless. Several times, I felt I did not want to carry on with my life; I wanted to end it. Little did I know at that time that I was being healed, just in a different way.

I can't exactly tell you how I conquered my depression and anger. I wish I could remember the exact day, the exact moment my heart softened, but I can't. I just know that my heart changed when I realized God didn't want me to suffer. I started praying again and put my holy statues and pictures of Jesus back in their rightful places – back in my heart. I suppose that you can't have light without darkness; I look back at this time in my life and thank God for never leaving me, even when I tried running from Him. I am grateful He had hope in me.

Even so, I definitely still had hard days when I wished and prayed for miraculous healing. In 2015, I experienced heart failure. It was the scariest day of my life when I heard those words, "Heart. Failure." I had to prepare for serious heart surgery, and for the first time I was facing and fearing death. I was in the hospital for a month.

When I was in the hospital, Sr. Jordan Rose shared with me these two words: "Take Heart." It says in *Psalms* 27: "Let your hope be in the Lord; take heart and be strong; yes, let your hope be in the Lord." This means, "Have courage! Have hope!" I came to know that "my health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart. He is mine forever" (*Ps* 73:26).

My experience of suffering has brought me closer to Jesus. I am strongly inspired and drawn to Blessed Chiara Luce Badano. Her words, "For You, Jesus...If You want it, I want it too", remind me to trust and have hope in the Lord's plan for me. When I look beyond myself, I can unite my suffering with that of others, and I can unite my heart with the heart of Jesus. I find myself praying throughout the day, "Jesus, I trust in You." When I wake up, when I am anxious, when it's quiet, in all things, I pray: "Jesus, I trust in You."

This journey hasn't been easy, but my family and friends have carried me through. In hard times, my family looks for the good. We are a family of hope.

Hope is believing something good is going to happen. If you are struggling to hope, I recommend reading Fr. Michael Gaitley's book, *33 Days to Merciful Love*. This book encourages you to hope like Mary did at the Cross, to believe in God no matter how dark life gets, and to praise God no matter what is happening.

Gabbie is the blood sister of Sr. Jordan Rose, S.V. and currently lives in Cottonwood, Idaho with her family.



MEET
GABBIE





TORONTO

OUR NEW APOSTOLIC CENTRE!

St. Peter's Centre / Downtown Toronto

Friends, old and new, bustled about newly painted hallways, peaking into carefully arranged parlors and smiling with a shared sense of anticipation. What will the Lord do in this place? On Sept. 15, we officially opened our new apostolic centre beside St. Peter's Church in the heart of downtown Toronto. The centre will house our mission to pregnant women and our Hope & Healing mission for those who are suffering after abortion, and it will serve as a hub for spreading the Gospel of Life, through monthly Holy Hours and retreat opportunities. As we beheld St. Peter's Centre on opening day, our hearts sang out with the words of St. Peter himself, "Lord, it is good that we are here!"



istock: MN Studio

living with OPEN HANDS

Ben & Heather Akers know what it is to have their plans and expectations turned upside down by God. After both discerning religious life, they found that God was calling them to marriage. Initially unable to conceive, and after a long period of waiting, they adopted their first two children. The Lord later surprised them with three more children.

An interview with Ben and Heather

Ben and Heather's Story

by Sr. Maris Stella, S.V.

How has hope shaped your family?

Ben: Hope is such an important theme for us. The story of our life together has taught us to learn to live with open hands. Throughout salvation history, we see people grasping: Adam and Eve grasp for the fruit; Jacob and Isaac grasp for the blessing. That is what sin is, grasping beyond what God has designed for us. All the things that we wanted in our life, we had to learn to wait for. I look back now, and I see that all the waiting was an invitation to trust and to place our hope in God and His plans.

Heather: Hope has helped us to develop a vision of the higher things, the deeper spiritual realities. Hope allows me to trust in God's providence, even if I can't see it or feel it. It teaches me to believe that there is a greater good.

Ben: I love the image from the *Letter to the Hebrews* – the anchor as the symbol for hope. We cast the anchor of our souls into heaven, and the anchor keeps the ship stable. The storms come for all of us, and the Cross looks different in each person's life. But hope is such an inviting choice, because it broadens your perspective on everything. It takes trust to see all things in light of our eternal destiny.

Heather: I remember I used to get upset about every little thing. I had such narrow thoughts about how my life should be. Hope allowed me to see all things in His will. It is so freeing! I don't have to be blown about by my circumstances or difficulties; I can be calm and trust in the Lord. Hope in His plans expands my vision. I am learning to just trust. It's not that you trust God and you are going to get what you want. We are learning to trust that God's plan is the best.

We can grasp beyond what God has designed for us OR we can learn to live with open hands... trusting in God and His plans.

Do you have any advice as to how to cultivate hope in daily life?

Ben: We try to pray as a family. Some days are better than others. We sit down together every morning before anyone leaves for work or school, and we say a morning offering. The kids remind us if we forget. At night we pray the Rosary – well, just a decade. We are working up to a full Rosary.

Heather: None of our lives is extraordinary. It's just the basic vocation, trying to figure out how God wants you to follow Him and trusting His plan.

Ben: I look back on my life now and see that it all wasn't just an experience for *me* to grow in hope. I can also give this hope to other people. I can share failures and also the times I was faithful. Those who have hope in God live differently in the world.



◀ Ribbon cutting with Cardinal Collins

THE SISTERS OF LIFE
Annunciation Motherhouse
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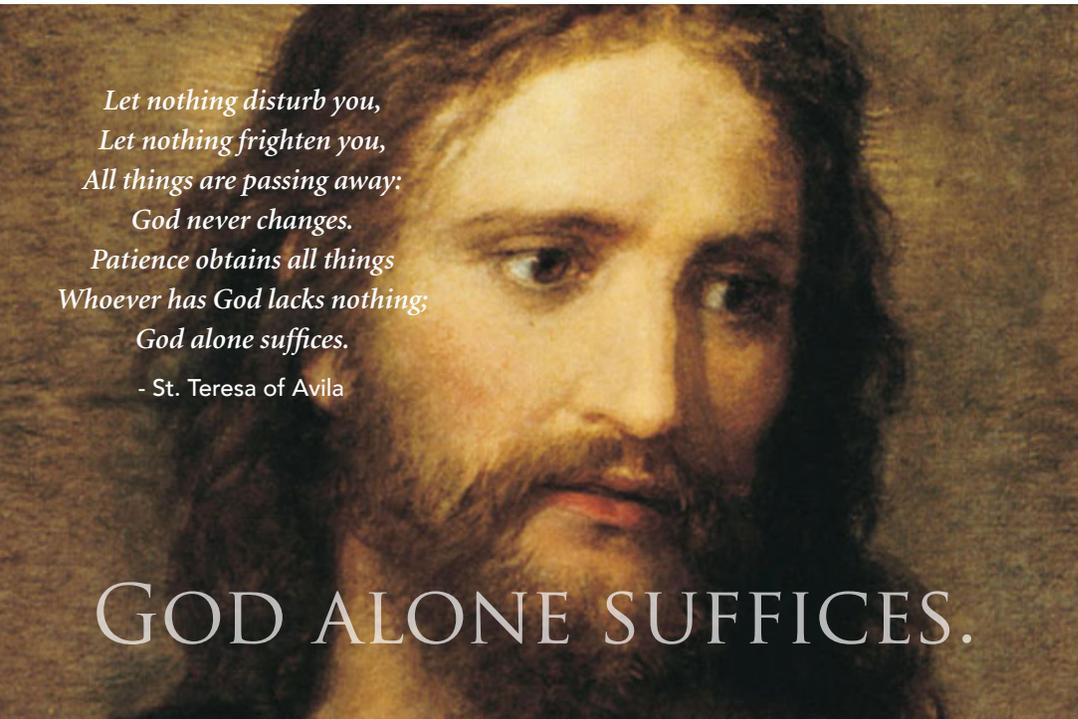
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*Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.*
- St. Teresa of Avila

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