

# The Walk to Bethlehem Devotions

A church and community wide  
program to increase the health  
of body, mind and spirit



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## INTRODUCTION

Walking is mentioned 247 times in the Bible. Our bodies were made for walking. We were built to stand erect. Our organs function best when given room to work. Our joints need movement to maintain good range of motion. None of this can be accomplished by sitting in a chair or lying on a couch. The benefits of walking are numerous. In a report from the US Surgeon General, "significant benefits can be obtained by including a moderate amount of physical activity (30 minutes of brisk walking or raking leaves, 15 minutes of running or 45 minutes of playing volleyball) on most days of the week. " The benefits of walking are compelling. Regular walking can prevent depression, lengthen lifespan, lower stress levels, relieve arthritis and back pain, strengthen muscles, bones and joints, improve sleep."

([aarp.org/health/fitness/walking](http://aarp.org/health/fitness/walking))

With all of these benefits, why wouldn't we want to walk? The 21st century time crunch and the multi-task generation is the problem. With this in mind, The Walk to Bethlehem provides an opportunity for walkers to exercise the physical body by walking, exercise the spiritual body by praying and exercise the mind by learning about countries and cultures

We hope you will use these devotionals and prayers to help exercise your spiritual body as you help CoMo TriParish Catholic community reach Bethlehem!

## HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

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The Walk to Bethlehem is an imaginary walk that encourages walkers to increase physical activity, spiritual growth and cultural awareness through a virtual tour to Bethlehem.

Since the first walks, churches and organizations throughout the United States and Canada have embraced this program. It has crossed the life-span and crossed all oceans. The initial route began in the Midwest, crossed the Atlantic Ocean and continued along the coast of Northern Africa through Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel.

Walkers from Hawaii crossed the Pacific Ocean and traveled through Korea, China and Europe. Walkers have taken detours to historic church landmarks. Walkers have visited missionaries in countries such as Tanzania and Kenya. All of this has been done with the intent of increasing the health of body, mind and spirit.

Many walkers have commented about how they have successfully increased their physical activity through this program because it is goal oriented and encourages team spirit and accountability. Others have commented about their increased knowledge and understanding of countries and cultures. Finally, the walkers have enjoyed the focus on prayer and spiritual growth through the devotions. Many walkers have found that their prayer time has increased and become more meaningful while walking.

I am thankful for the many parish nurses around the country who have used creativity in bringing this program to their congregations. Some positive outcomes are measurable by increased physical activity, but the spiritual and emotional outcomes, although not easily measured, are perhaps even more significant.

# Week 1—New Beginnings

*Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." ~ Luke 1:39-42*

Many can remember the excitement of that first day of school in the fall. We loved summer vacation, but the thrill of shopping for new school supplies and clothes, was invigorating. We looked forward to seeing school friends again and meeting our new teacher. It's interesting that for many, September still brings excitement and even a latent desire to sign up for a class, pursue a new hobby or call an old friend.

When we are children, Bethlehem and Christmas seem afar off in September. The time span from September to Christmas seems shorter as the years pass and towards the end of our life, those months are but a flash. However, the resolve and excitement of a fresh start are still present. We are refreshed from the slower pace of summer and anxious to get back into a routine.

September is a great time for a fresh start! As we begin our Walk to Bethlehem, think of how Mary felt while she was carrying Jesus.

Shortly after Mary was told she would bear the Son of God, she went quickly to the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The Scripture states that when Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant, Mary visited her and the babe leaped in Elizabeth's womb when Mary greeted Elizabeth.

Mary's life would change radically after Jesus was born. Our lives also change radically with the birth of the Savior. When we are reborn in Jesus, life is never the same. We begin the walk of faith for a lifetime.

Just as we are transformed spiritually in our life of faith, The Walk to Bethlehem can also bring change and transformation into our lives. We can determine to take better care of the body God has given us. By beginning a physical walk with stated and measurable goals, we will find that we have more energy to accomplish those things that God has for us to do. Our physical, spiritual and emotional life will change positively and we will affect our world and those in our world in a positive way.

As we begin our journey to Bethlehem, let's begin by examining those things that help and hinder our transformation.

## **Questions to ponder:**

- What hinders me from living a disciplined life?
- Are there areas in my life that are disciplined?
- Are they physical disciplines or spiritual disciplines?
- Are there areas in my life that are not disciplined?
  - Are they physical or spiritual?
- Is there something in my life - spiritual, physical or emotional that needs change and transformation?

# Week 2—The Ripple Maker

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ~ Matthew 9:35*

What does it take to change a community? What does it take to change a lifestyle? What does it take to change the world?

The Pike Street Market in Seattle is a wonderful myriad of tastes, smells, sights and sounds. Musicians frequently gather to entertain shoppers and the curious. The music is high quality and entertaining. A similar scene is acted out everyday in cities across the world. People stand and listen respectfully, and then from the crowd, a brave soul breaks the silence and walks to the open violin case, depositing a gift of appreciation. Soon others break the silence and step up in a spirit of bashful thankfulness. The air is somewhat tense, but the music becomes sweeter.

Jesus was perhaps the greatest ripple maker who ever lived on this earth. Everywhere He went He influenced behavior for the good. His small band of disciples became ripple makers and today we who believe in Jesus Christ are examples of the influence and courage of those early believers.

We all have the capability to be ripple makers and change agents in this world. We can begin by influencing our immediate group of friends, family and co-workers. A kind word, encouragement to make healthy lifestyle choices, to join a study group, to attend a worship service or to take a walk, are all positive ripples. Can we change the world? Yes!

As we walk to Bethlehem and study about people of different countries and cultures, we can also pray for the people in those countries. As we walk to Bethlehem we can invite friends and neighbors to walk along with us. As we walk, we can speak words of hope and peace to them. That's what the ripple effect is all about: Influencing our world (personal, local and global) in a positive way — one person at a time.

## **Questions to ponder:**

- Who are the people in my sphere of influence?
  - Am I a positive or negative ripple maker?
  - How can I influence my friends, family and neighbors for good?
- Is there someone I can ask to walk alongside me?



## Week 3—Ohana

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

~Galatians 3:26-29

Who is in your Ohana? The Hawaiians have a wonderful word in their vocabulary that means family. The word means so much more than family. Ohana is the extended family of relationships that we have with each other. You don't have to be Hawaiian to be a part of the Ohana in Hawaii. It is simply understood that family and friends are bound together and members of the Ohana cooperate and honor each other.

When the angel of the Lord told Mary that she was to birth the son of God and that her relative Elizabeth was to have a child, she *"got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth."*

~Luke 2:39-40

Mary hurried to see her blood relative Elizabeth for the support of her Ohana. As Jesus' ministry developed we see that He formed a new family known as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bloodlines and family trees are no longer required to be part of the family of God. Those who know Christ are part of the Ohana of God. When we become part of the family of God, we are bound by a most amazing blood relationship.

### Questions to Ponder:

- Are your friendships superficial or deep?
- What makes a friendship deep and lasting?
- Do you have a friend you share personal struggles and joys with?
- Do you share personal struggles and joys with Jesus, the wonderful counselor?
- In not, how can you cultivate this friendship with God?



# Week 4—Prince of Peace

*For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ~Isaiah 9:6*

It is ironic that Bethlehem, the tiny town where Jesus was born, is now the center of division, barbed wired fences and threatening conflict. And yet, He is the Prince of Peace. Because He brings light, life and peace into a very dark world, there is tension.

The Light in the darkness creates the tension. He came to break through darkness and He continues to do so. What a comfort it is to cling to these words from Isaiah which remind us that He is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and prince of Peace.

I wonder if we would live differently if we reminded ourselves on a daily basis that Jesus Christ is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. When darkness surrounds us, when we are overwhelmed with an important decision, when our world seems to be falling apart, how differently would we react to these situations if we constantly repeated these words from Isaiah; Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace!

As we walk this week, it may be appropriate to reflect on this description of the Messiah. It can be our prayer that the world will take note at this Christmas time of the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

May the Truth of the Christmas message break through the superficiality of the shopping frenzy and credit card debt. May we all have an opportunity to bring the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace to everyone we meet this Christmas season.

## **Questions to Ponder:**

- What areas of the world need our special prayer at this time?
- What areas need to be surrounded by the Prince of Peace?
- In what ways can Jesus Christ be our Wonderful Counselor?
  - Through what means does He counsel us?



# Week 5—Prayers for Christmas Week

Lord, in this holy season of prayer and song and laughter, we praise you for the great wonders you have sent us: for shining star and angel's song, for infant's cry in lowly manger. We praise you for the Word made flesh in a little Child. We behold his glory, and are bathed in its radiance.

Be with us as we sing the ironies of Christmas, the incomprehensible comprehended, the poetry made hard fact, the helpless Babe who cracks the world asunder. We kneel before you shepherds, innkeepers, wisemen. Help us to rise bigger than we are. Amen.

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=345>

God of love, Father of all,  
the darkness that covered the earth  
has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made  
flesh. Make us a people of this light.

Make us faithful to your Word,  
that we may bring your life to the waiting world.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=3230>

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment  
in which the Son of God was born  
of the most pure Virgin Mary,  
at midnight,  
in Bethlehem,  
in the piercing cold.

In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God,  
to hear my prayer and grant my desires,  
[State your intention(s) here...]

through the merits of Our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
and of His blessed Mother.  
Amen.

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=573>



# Week 6—Final Steps on the Journey

*He has shown you, O man, what is good.*

*And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy*

*And to walk humbly with your God*      ~Micah 6:8

All that I am, Lord

I place in Your hands,

All that I do, Lord

I place in Your hands

Everything I work for

I place in Your hands

Everything I hope for

I place in Your hands

The troubles that weary me

I place in Your hands

The thoughts that disturb me

I place in Your hands

Each that I pray for

I place in Your hands

Each that I care for

I place in Your hands

## **Question to Ponder:**

- How can I make my walk with God more intimate and real?



Thank you for  
journeying to  
Bethlehem with  
us. Please join us  
in celebrating the  
end of our  
journey!



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