



**ADVENT  
CHRISTMAS 2023**

**HE DREW NEAR**

**FAMILY  
PRAYER**



Jean Marie Pirot, aka Arcabas, was born in France (in Lorraine) in 1926 and died on 23 August 2018 in his home in Saint Pierre de Chartreuse. An eclectic artist, he used his extraordinary artistic talent to create paintings, sculptures, engravings, mosaics and stained glass windows. His main work is the decoration of the church of Saint Hugues de Chartreuse, which he began to create in 1953. In 1984 the church became the “Departmental Museum of Sacred Art” and contains a significant portion of his artistic production. His works can be found in France, Germany, Mexico, Italy, Canada, the United States, in several European museums and in multiple private collections.




Cover image::  
**Arcabas (Jean Marie Pirot),  
Pilgrims of Emmaus, Arcabas. Lc 24,15**  
Emmaus Cycle, Church of the Resurrection, Torre de' Roveri (Bg)

## Dear families,

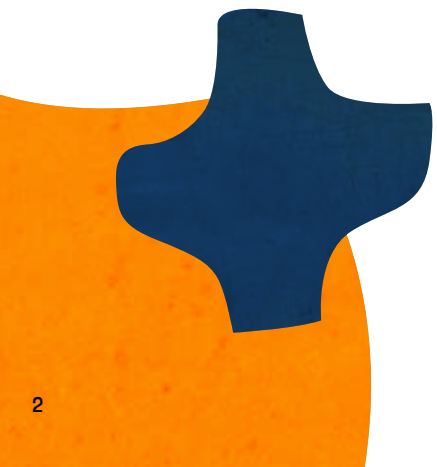
I am close to you in this Season of Advent to prepare together for Christmas, when our journey of waiting will lead us once again to encounter God in a child, lying on the straw of a manger. The steps to reach that meeting are still to be taken. The night will be the frame of our journey: from servants who keep watch, locked in the house, the return of the master to the shepherds who leave the flock, trusting in the voice of angels. The hope is that the Advent that we are preparing to live will be dotted with steps of getting closer to ourselves, to others and to God, opening ourselves up to the surprises that the road will reserve for us. For the disciples of Emmaus, They were approached by God himself as a pilgrim like them. Let Him draw near to us.

*A Blessed Journey,  
+Francesco*





“**He drew near**” is the movement that Jesus makes towards the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24), the evangelical icon chosen by our Bishop to accompany the pastoral year of our Diocese, shown on the cover of this booklet. “**He drew near**” is the style with which God chooses to enter the history of men, becoming a neighbor and brother while man goes on his way and lives his life.



Christmas, for which we prepare with **family prayer**, made up of words, gestures and little windows that are open, is the fulfillment of this approach, when we celebrate God becoming flesh in that defenseless child born in Bethlehem. Christmas wishes to be the fulfillment of our approach, of our journey of waiting completed throughout the Advent.

**Let's pack our backpack** and set off: from stage to stage, we will find what we need!

The weekly rhythm of **prayer for adults and children** will be marked by seven icons, one for each different mode of prayer, starting from Sunday:



The **CHALICE AND THE PATHEN**: to gather us in **prayer** on the Lord's Day,



The **PLATE**: to **bless the table** and the family on Thursday,



**PARENTHESIS**: to educate ourselves in **understanding the Word** on Monday,



The **CANDELABRA**: to **end the day** in prayer on Friday,



The **BOOK**: to be inspired by **culture** on Tuesday,



**THE EYE**: to let ourselves be **provoked** by Arcabas' work on Saturday.



**THE ASTERISK**: to listen to **the voices of brothers** in the faith on Wednesday,

Every day we will be invited to **open a window on the calendar**, not only as a sign of the approaching Christmas, but as a further tool of prayer.



At the beginning of Advent, let's take some quiet time to prepare our home for Christmas.

We remove from boxes, dusty from months of rest, the lights of the christmas tree and sheep of the nativity scene on the shelves in the cellar. Let's not forget the hut and the straw, let's place the manger and then the ox... Mary, Joseph and the donkey maybe get closer a little bit.

The Christmas tree and the nativity scene are signs with very ancient origins; for the second of the two, 800 years since his birth will be celebrated in 2023, at the wish of Saint Francis of Assisi. The last years of Francis' life were rather painful: his illness and the situation of his new order put him to the test. But they are also the years in which an intimate joy and an all-pervading sense of fullness seem to take hold of him. With these feelings is the testimony of the unique Christmas in the mountains, which Francis wants to celebrate in Greccio - a place so dear to him - on 25 1223.

To Giovanni Velita, lord of Greccio, Francesco said:

*“Behold, I would like you to have a manger with hay placed in some cave in the mountain that you possess and bring an ox and a donkey there, just as they were in Bethlehem. On Christmas night I will come up there and, all together, we will pray in the cave.”*

Christmas night arrives: everything is ready in the cave. The nativity scene and a small altar. It was as if Bethlehem, that year, had reached the top of the Greccio mountain. The priest begins the Christmas Mass. Francis sings the Gospel. The culmination of the celebration: Francis takes in his arms that child placed on the hay who, through Francis’ faith, seems to come to life and be reborn in the hearts of those present.

The nativity scene, therefore, was born as “alive”. Then throughout history, this experience comes back to life with the figurines, some of them beautiful, which we will see in the various nativity scenes and also place in our homes. May all this help us to experience the joy and truth of Christmas.

# Charitable project

Let us take the example of Jesus' approach to the two disciples of Emmaus while they were on the road and conversing, disappointed and discouraged, choosing - in our turn - to be close to those for whom the road has become a place of life, and not just a hasty passage.

Diocesan Caritas invites us to pay our attention to all its main street services:

## Zabulòn showers

The Zabulòn space welcomes people in situations of serious marginalization and without home and is able to guarantee 20 shower stalls and a change of underclothes every day.

## Rest Point/Irene Space

These two services, the first aimed at everyone, the second at women, constitute the daytime offering of services. Here homeless people can find refreshment and establish relationships in a welcoming place. The style is that of "involvement": people are directly involved in the management of spaces and in the choice of recreational, cultural and reflective activities.



## Shared closet

With Shared Wardrobe we not only provide clothing, but we contribute to establishing a virtuous circle that allows homeless people to wash, store and take care of their clothing.

## "Beato Luigi Palazzolo" female dormitory

The dormitory, managed with the Institute of the Poverelle Sisters, offers to girls in situations of serious marginalization an informal place of listening and immediate welcome.

Each of these services can continue to operate only thanks to the generosity of our benefactors. To contribute:

- it is possible to donate to the Diakonia Onlus Foundation

**IBAN IT31A0760111100001048525214 - Causal "Advent 2023"**

- donate new men's underwear (shirts and briefs sizes S-XXL and TU socks) to be delivered to Via del Conventino 8, in Bergamo, from Monday to Friday morning.

**1** ADVENT  
WEEK

# TOGETHER IN THE VIGIL

**The awaited guest**  
*Oil painting on canvas*  
Milan (private collection)





## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to Mark (13,33–37)

**B**e watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”



Let's open the calendar window  
To discover the symbol that will accompany us in the prayer of the week and the gesture proposed to the children.

Let us pray together, saying:  
*Lord, help us to stay awake.*

Come Lord Jesus, we are waiting for you. **Rit.**

We want to make room for you in our hearts and in our lives. **Rit.**

Sometimes our desire is overwhelmed by tiredness or worries. **Rit.**



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's read together the Gospel passage, proclaimed yesterday at mass, and the comment by Don Dorian Locatelli, priest of our Diocese, which we find below.

In the Gospel passage, the imperative “Watch!” returns three times, in just a few verses. Jesus addresses everyone and highlights at least three aspects regarding the need to keep watch. First of all, keeping vigil is equivalent to waiting for the return of the “master of the house”: Advent is waiting for Someone, it is preparation for a meeting. The Christian keeps watch in industriousness and responsibility, since the Lord has entrusted us with “his house” and has assigned each one “their own task”. Finally, being awake is continually threatened by the possibility of falling asleep, allowing the desire for the Lord to be extinguished, overwhelmed by the many worries that distract the attention from Him. Together we can help each other keep watch, becoming for each other a light that illuminates, a candle that guides our steps.



Let's leave a few moments of silence.

We then open the calendar window to entrust our vigil to the Lord, discover the refrain of the responsorial prayer and pray together.

Sometimes we feel that we are missing something in life, but in reality we are missing Someone. **Rit.**

You are present, you walk with us; we are the ones who don't see you! **Rit.**

Open our eyes and our hearts, so that we can see you beside us. **Rit.**



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Today we allow ourselves to be accompanied and provoked by the words of Ignazio Silone, author of novels such as *Fontamara*, *Wine and bread*, *The adventure of a poor Christian*.

*I am tired of Christians who await the coming of their Lord with the same indifference with which they await the arrival of the bus*

*(Ignazio Silone)*

Curious observation of the Abruzzo writer and profoundly true: just observe the people at the bus stop, almost always lost in their cell phones. Unless something unexpected happens (the bus is late) and you are late for some appointment. Indifference then gives way to a certain impatience, to the watchful gaze, to the tension of those who wait with all their being. May our waiting for the coming of the Lord be like this.

Let's open the calendar window to let ourselves be provoked by the questions proposed.



Let's leave a few moments of silence and share out loud what resonated in us in trying to answer the questions proposed.

We conclude by holding hands and reciting the prayer of Our Father together.



LET'S LISTEN

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's read together the testimony, collected by the educational team of Area Strada of the Diocesan Caritas, of a guest of the Galgario Dormitory.

It's late and it's starting to get cold outside: I just entered the dormitory door with my backpack and a bag of food recovered at the station.

From the darkness of the street I am immediately struck by the presence of an African boy in the middle of the cloister: he is sitting on the floor in front of a chair on which a book is placed, a candle next to him illuminates his reading; I feel a very strong emotion that sweeps away the desperation of these days on the street, I stare at that small flame that manages to warm me from afar. It's a powerful but quick thought because shortly after, after going up a flight of stairs, I find myself in the corridor of the dormitory. Just before closing my eyes, overcome by tiredness, I remember that boy with his book and his candle: he seemed to be waiting for something new and perhaps we are all waiting for something here.



Let's open the calendar window  
to discover today's prayer intention and expectation for this Advent.

We join hands and recite the prayer of Our Father together.



WE ENTRUST

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's open the calendar window and we carry out the gesture that is suggested.



Standing around the table, we join hands  
and one prays for everyone with the words that follow.

We thank you, Lord, for this food,  
prepared with care and love.  
May the energy you give us strengthen our family.  
Make us capable of diligent and responsible waiting.  
The light with which you illuminate our lives,  
make us aware to be brothers of every man,  
committed to contributing to happiness  
of every family we meet.  
In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

If there are children, the parents trace a sign of the cross on their children's foreheads.

We conclude with the prayer of Our Father.

The candle remains lit throughout the meal.



WE BLESS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

We conclude our day together, gathering for the night prayer.



Let's open the calendar window to discover the refrain of the responsorial prayer and sing it together.

Lord, you created us to be full of grace and you also repeat to us: "I am with you". Give us a new heart, capable of seeing you and loving you. **Rit.**

We too, like Mary, are aware of our littleness. But You also repeat to us: «Do not be afraid, ... nothing is impossible with God». **Rit.**

Maria knew how to make her life a continuous waiting for your presence. Together with her we also want to be the embodiment of your love. **Rit.**

Lord, with You life is not nostalgia but fullness. Mary opened the way for us with her "Here I am". She also enlightens us so that we can experience the happiness for which you created us. **Rit.**

We conclude with the prayer blessing of Compline:

May the Lord grant us a peaceful night and a restful sleep. Amen.



LET'S VIGIL

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 – SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION





## SIGN OF THE CROSS


Let's go back to page. 8 and let's take a few moments to carefully observe Arcabas' work, chosen to accompany this week's prayer, sharing what strikes us most.

Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

Locked in the house, sitting, in the darkness broken only by the light of a candle, his arms crossed leaning on the table, his gaze a little tired, the man waits. Patiently, without haste or anxiety, calmly, the man waits, sure that his waiting will not be in vain.

And here is a light knock, small knocks given with the knuckle of a finger on the wooden door. The little chimes on the wood become red notes, three notes, three little strokes. The man has not yet opened the door, but he has opened his heart, and the small cross is already entering the house, while the messenger, with his message clutched in his hand, is still waiting to enter.

Below, almost as if to support the man, the golden form that is the Spirit. But only the dark cross of Jesus is empty. Man founded his expectation of him, his hope, his certainty on the Lord. And now he will have the message - and the visit - that he has been waiting for so long. The golden cross that is Jesus is about to enter his house. Come, Lord Jesus.



Let's open the calendar window

And let's find out what we are called to do so as not to lose the trace of the journey.

Let's join hands and recite the Hail Mary together, entrusting all our expectations to her.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

2 ADVENT  
WEEK

TOGETHER  
IN  
CONVERSION



**The messenger angel**  
*Oil painting on canvas*  
Milan (private collection))



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to Mark (1, 1–5)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God). As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 3 “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’” John (the) Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.



Let's open the calendar window

To discover the symbol that will accompany us in the prayer of the week and the gesture proposed to the children.

Let us pray together, saying:

*Lord, help us prepare for your coming.*

You come to meet us, but will we be able to see you? **Rit.**

John invites us to prepare the way by converting, changing our lives in your direction. **Rit.**

He forgives our sins and we will have clear eyes to see you in our story. **Rit.**



LET'S PRAY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's read together the Gospel passage, proclaimed yesterday at mass, and the comment by Don Doriano Locatelli, priest of our Diocese, which we find below.

The beginning of Mark's gospel immediately declares what his objective is: to accompany us in recognizing that Jesus is the Son of God, as the centurion will exclaim under the cross (Mk 15, 39). This recognition is possible on one condition: converting, removing everything that prevents us from being in tune with Jesus, everything that distracts us. Preparing the way is an invitation to "roll up our sleeves"; welcoming the voice of those good witnesses who announce to us the approach of the Word. Conversion is always - although it is often forgotten - a community action and never alone. John the Baptist is sent with the mission of preparing a welcoming people, purified from evil, eager for renewal. A free people. Together... in conversion, supporting each other, in showing our brothers the way of the Lord, offering that water which is a sign of the Holy Spirit.



Let's leave a few moments of silence.

We then open the calendar window to entrust our desire for conversion to the Lord, discover the refrain of the responsorial prayer and pray together.

You are coming, but we are not ready to welcome you yet. **Rit.**

Our heart is still full of cumbersome desires that leave no room for you in our lives. **Rit.**

To welcome a great gift, like your Son, you need a heart trained in love without measure. **Rit.**

WE MEDITATE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Today we allow ourselves to be accompanied and provoked by the words of Dag Hammarskjold, Swedish politician, second secretary general of the United Nations from 1953 to 1961.

*You who are above us, you who are also in us,  
may everyone see you in me too,  
may I prepare the way for you,  
may I give thanks for everything that happens to me.  
May I not forget the needs of others in this.  
Hold me in your love just as you want everyone to dwell in mine.  
(Dag Hammarskjold, Traces of the journey)*

**F**ew words from a longer prayer from this man of international politics, who died in a plane crash in Zambia during a peacekeeping mission. Hammarskjold's desire to be able to bear witness to God, living with gratitude and love, responds to the Baptist's invitation to convert and prepare the way for the Lord who comes.



Let's open the calendar window to let ourselves be provoked by the questions proposed.

Let's leave a few moments of silence and share out loud what resonated in us in trying to answer the questions proposed.

We conclude by holding hands and reciting the prayer of Our Father together.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's read together the testimony, collected by the educational team of the Road Area of the Diocesan Caritas, of a volunteer from the Galgario Dormitory.

When I volunteered for Caritas, they asked me if I wanted to join the group that takes care of the shower service. I accepted, I made myself available and I learned everything quickly: how to sanitize, how to organize the warehouse of underclothes, how to record attendance. Initially I thought about how important this activity is to guarantee hygiene for those who have nothing, but then, meeting after meeting, I also discovered how much power the water may have for people: someone arrives angry, grumpy and literally changes after the shower. Face as if the water had washed away all the “ugly” of living on the streets. For Muslim brothers, it is essential to show up clean for prayer: on Fridays we welcome them even if they arrive a little bit late.



Let's open the calendar window to discover today's prayer intention and write down our commitment to conversion this Advent.

We join hands and recite the prayer of Our Father together.

WE ENTRUST

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's open the calendar window and we carry out the gesture that is suggested.



Standing around the table, we join hands and one prays for everyone with the words that follow.

We thank You, Lord, for the food you give us. Give us the strength to change our lives, making it welcoming to the people we meet every day, so that we can meet you walking together with them.

And forgive us for all the times our lives go in a different direction than yours.  
Amen.

Let us now wash each other's hands in the bowl of water and then, taking each other by the hand, recite the Lord's Prayer.

The candle remains lit throughout the meal.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

We conclude our day together, gathering for the night prayer.



Let's open the calendar window to discover the refrain of the responsorial prayer and sing it together.

John the Baptist prepared his heart by going into the desert, and in the solitude of the essential he knew how to listen to your voice to the point of becoming your voice.

Help us, Lord, to create moments of silence in our lives so that we can meet you.

**Rit.**

How many voices urge our ego today, voices that clutter our hearts and hide you from our sight. Help us to seek first of all You, Lord, who loves us and saves us.

**Rit.**

May our conversion at your coming not be the fruit of our own effort, but rather the response to your gift of love for us.

Help us to welcome you, Lord, so that we too may become your witnesses. **Rit.**

We conclude with the prayer blessing of Compline:

May the Lord grant us a peaceful night and a restful sleep. Amen.



LET'S VIGIL

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's go back to page 16 and let us take a few moments to look carefully at the work of Arcabas, chosen to accompany this week's prayer, sharing what strikes us most.

Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

The angel left suddenly. Called by the Lord, he rushed and received a message to deliver. Who will it be for? For humanity, of course: the rolled-up sheet of paper is not sealed, because it must be read by everyone. Oddly enough, the light and beautiful wings that Arcabas gives to his angels here are massive, heavy, almost unsuitable for flight. This is why the angel sets off on foot, in a hurry: that message must be delivered, immediately. Because it says something new, something unheard of: it speaks of a God who is about to become man, indeed, who will become a newborn baby, in order to be able to live the entire history of men. Next to them. The message stands out against a black background and this, together with the red-stained wing, makes us understand that there will also be pain in the life of the child who is God... This is why the angel has a sad face, expressionless eyes, wings weighed down by pain. Yet, if we look closely, we see that around the message, around that black that weighs on the heart, a thin stroke of gold is spreading, which will certainly grow and which allows us to rejoice for the birth of a child and for the hope it brings with it.



Let's open the calendar window

And let's find out what we are called to do so as not to lose the trace of the journey.

Let us take each other by the hand and recite the Hail Mary together, entrusting to her all our commitments of conversion.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

**3** ADVENT  
WEEK

# TOGETHER IN RESEARCH



**John, the Baptist**  
*Oil painting on canvas*  
Saint-Hugues-de-Chartreuse (France)



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to John (1, 6-8.19-22)

A man sent by God came, and his name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he had to bear witness to the light. This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny. He confessed, “I am not the Christ.” Then they asked him, “Who are you, then? Are you Elijah?” “I’m not,” he said. “Are you the prophet?” “No,” he said. Then they said to him, “Who are you? So that we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

 Let's open the calendar window  
To discover the symbol that will accompany us in the prayer of the week and the gesture proposed to the children.

Let us pray together, saying:

*Make us your witnesses, Jesus.*

You are the Word. Fill our hearts so that we can be your voice. **Rit.**

You are life. Quench our thirst so that we may know how to point out to others your source. **Rit.**

You are happiness. Support our journey so that we can meet you together with our brothers and sisters. **Rit.**



LET'S PRAY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let us read together the Gospel passage, proclaimed yesterday at Mass, and the commentary of Fr. Doriano Locatelli, priest of our Diocese, which we find below.

**A**dvent is research. John the Baptist is subjected to a sort of “interrogation”: priests and Levites, coming from Jerusalem, ask him the decisive question: who are you? It is the question that runs through the life of each one, that determines the choices, the mission.

A few verses later, John evokes the image of sandals in saying of himself, of his identity and mission: I am not worthy to untie the lace of the sandal of the one who comes after me! The Lord comes as a pilgrim, he walks along our roads: this is why it is so necessary to prepare the way! However, he often encounters indifference and superficiality. In this third week of Advent, in the run-up to Christmas, we are invited to intensify our search for him in the knowledge of ourselves. Only those who recognize themselves as small can truly desire to welcome the Savior of the world.



Let's leave a few moments of silence.

Let us then open the window of the calendar to entrust to the Lord our search for him in our lives, discover the refrain of responsorial prayer and pray together.

John, sent by God, chose the way of the desert to find you. **Rit.**

To those who asked him who he was, John replied that he was a voice, a witness of the light. **Rit.**

By encountering you, we can, like John, discover our mission. **Rit.**

WE MEDITATE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Today we let ourselves be accompanied and provoked by the words of Sylvie Germain, writer, philosopher and French teacher, quoted in the text *Life on foot* by David Le Breton.

*The story of each and every one of us begins again without stopping: walking, walking day after day on Earth, challenging heaviness and immobility, facing the paths of time, of reality and dream, scrutinizing the night and the light, listening to the sayings of the wind, to the words of others.*

*(Sylvie Germán)*

The essay *Life on foot* tells the story of human life as a continuous movement. For the Christian, living is not simply a movement, but the desire and constant search for an encounter with Jesus, the Word of God offered to all men and women as a gift of salvation.



Let's open the calendar window to let ourselves be provoked by the questions proposed.

Let's leave a few moments of silence and share out loud what resonated in us in trying to answer the questions proposed.

We conclude by holding hands and reciting the prayer of Our Father together.



LET'S LISTEN

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let us read together the testimony, collected by the educational team of the Diocesan Caritas Road Area, of a guest of Galgario Dormitory.

Walking the streets of the city, walking at night, never taking off her shoes. I can pick them up at Caritas: I always ask if I could have used them, and every now and then as I walk, I try to imagine whose they were, what life they had before they were mine. There are volunteers who give them to me and when they ask me for the number and if I like them, I feel important and I remember as a child when I would enter the store with my mom and the saleswoman would bend down to help me try them on and I felt like the most important of all the kings on earth. I've never said this to the volunteers, they always have a lot to do, but sooner or later I'll have to tell them how nice it is for me to know that they are waiting for me to give me shoes.



Let's open the calendar window to discover today's prayer intention and write our research this Advent.

We join hands and recite the prayer of Our Father together.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20

WE ENTRUST

## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's open the calendar window and we carry out the gesture that is suggested.



Standing around the table, we join hands and one prays for everyone with the words that follow.

Thank you, Lord, for the food with which you provide for our lives. May it generate in us the strength we need to set out in search of your presence in our lives. We know that our inconstancy makes us unworthy to untie even the lace of your sandal; but we are sure that You love us even in our frailties, and you come to meet us to sustain us with Your strength.  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

We write about the design of the sandals, a commitment to Christmas that we take as a family. Then, taking each other by the hand, we recite the Lord's Prayer.

The candle remains lit throughout the meal.



WE BLESS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

We conclude our day together, gathering for the night prayer.



Let's open the calendar window to discover the refrain of the responsorial prayer and sing it together.

John was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light.

Despite the shadows that we have within, you also call us to welcome and bear witness to your light. Thank you, Lord! **Rit.**

Our lives experience anxieties, frailties, sins. But you call us to be witnesses of hope, of the future, of a God in love with man, who has chosen to walk with us. **Rit.**

“Who are you? What do you say about yourself?” This is the question that life also poses to us as to John. We are still searching, Lord, but we know that we must seek the answer in You. Come to meet us, Lord! **Rit.**

We conclude with the prayer blessing of Compline:  
May the Lord grant us a peaceful night and a restful sleep. Amen.



LET'S VIGIL

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Let's go back to page 24 and take a few moments to look carefully at the work of Arcabas, chosen to accompany this week's prayer, sharing what strikes us most.

Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

**A** strong, intense, disturbing image. A man we perceive dressed in skins but of whom we only see the arms and that face...

"The voice of him who cries in the wilderness," says the Gospel. John shouts, loudly, with all the voice he has. To the people of his time and to us. He shouts that someone is coming (and points in the direction with his left hand) and where it comes from, and his finger seems to pierce the gold that is the sky, right above him, right around him. From up there. Who is coming—and to whom he is not worthy to tie his sandals—comes from God. It's too important, it's too big for anyone not to understand. And so, John shouts his message, his lips shining through his beard, his sculpted nose, and those dishevelled, wide, bloodshot eyes. Crazy expression, at first glance. But if we look at those eyes, we clearly see a need, a mission: that of making us understand who is coming, and his importance, and his life that will become salvation for us.

Shout with all your heart, John, as long as he can, and soon his voice will be silenced.

Before him is the form of the incarnation and that of passion and death. The last prophet of the Old Testament, capable of recognizing Jesus even before he was born, and the first prophet of the second. The man on horseback of history.



Let's open the calendar window

And let's find out what we are called to do so as not to lose the trace of the journey.

Let us take each other by the hand and recite the Hail Mary together, entrusting to her the search for happiness and for God.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23

**4** ADVENT  
WEEK

# TOGETHER IN THE RECEPTION



Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

The iconography is the classic one of the Annunciation: Mary and the angel, the book, the lily... but Arcabas puts something different into it: the fear of the angel. Mary is seated and reading and the angel appears behind her, rests one knee on the ground to stand at the same height as the girl and then greets her and then speaks to her.

Absurd words, meaningless words, at least humanly.

And so, Mary looks at him and puts her hand to her chest, as if to say: "Me? Are you telling me these things? Really to me?"

The angel speaks and speaks, as if to fill the silence of the girl with words. He had a really tough assignment this time. Almost impossible. Because not only does he have to go to Nazareth, look for a virgin girl brought up in the temple, tell her that God wants her to be the mother of his Son, that he will be a child... No, not only this: he must also bring a "yes" to God.

Eyes wide open, words upon words, hair blowing in the wind, the angel no longer knows what to say.

### **Annunciation**

*Oil painting on canvas*

Torre de' Roveri (Bergamo)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to Luke (1, 26–38)

At that time, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to a man of the house of David, named Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary. When he came to her, he said, "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you." At these words she was greatly disturbed, and wondered what was the meaning of such a greeting. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you shall conceive a son, and give birth to him, and call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child who will be born will be holy and will be called the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your kinswoman, in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her, who was said to be barren: nothing is impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." And the angel left her.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2<sup>nd</sup>



Let's open the calendar window

To discover the symbol that will accompany us in the prayer of the week and the gesture proposed to the children.

Let us pray together, saying:

*Help us to welcome you, Lord.*

As for Mary, for us too your coming is a gift that we find difficult to understand. **Rit.**

Following Mary's example, we wish to open our hearts to you who draw near to our lives. **Rit.**

And together with Mary, we say to you with an open heart: "Let it be done to me according to your word". **Rit.**



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

CHRISTMAS

TOGETHER  
IN  
BIRTH



Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

It's night.

The incredible day is over. Joseph took his bride to Bethlehem, found her a manger, and there the child was born.

The child of Mary, the child of God. The kid who is going to call him father.

Joseph prepared a bed, as comfortable as possible, for Mary. He helped her to lie down, wrapped in her sky-coloured cloak, with the baby clinging to her heart. Then he took off his cloak and laid it over them, to keep them warm.

Watch the animals try to warm the mother and her baby with their warm breath. He looks, no longer surprised, at the little angels who, one after the other, descend to look at the infinite tenderness of a God made a child.

And you make love. Pure, incorporeal, almost transparent love. He will be by Mary's side and the child forever, taking care of them, every day, every moment. He will dedicate his life and all his love to them.

And the little Jesus will call him "Abba", father.

## Nativity in Bethlehem

*Oil painting on canvas*

Malines (Belgium)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to Luke (2, 1-14)

In those days a decree of Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken of the whole earth. This first census was taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone went to be counted, each in his own city. Joseph, too, from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, went up to Judea to the city of David called Bethlehem, for he belonged to the house and family of David. He had to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pregnant. While they were there, the days of childbirth were fulfilled for her. She gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. There were some shepherds in that region who, sleeping in the open air, kept watch all night guarding their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shrouded them in light. They were greatly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid: behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people: this day in the city of David a Saviour is born to you, who is Christ the Lord. This is the sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And immediately there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men whom he loves."



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25





Let's open the calendar window

To discover the symbol that will accompany us in the prayer of the week and the gesture proposed to the children.

Let us pray together, saying:

*You were born for us: thank you Lord!*

The wait, with our journey of search and conversion, is over. **Rit.**

Your coming into history is an extraordinary event, and at the same time ordinary: you are born a child and poor, on the outskirts of a big town. **Rit.**

Your birth and the way in which it took place speaks to us of you, and asks us to believe you as the Child God. **Rit.**



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25

EPIPHANY

TOGETHER  
IN DESIRE



Let's now read the comment by Rosella Ferrari, friend and enthusiast of Arcabas' works.

The procession that has intrigued everyone stops in front of Herod's palace, which receives the three wise men.

Herod listens, looks at the wise man who points out with his finger that a star has shown them the way, guiding them there. He listens to them talk about a King who has just been born and hears them ask him where they could find him, because they want to go and worship him. Next to them, the squires take care of the horses of the three, trying to hold back the one that has gone wild and seems to be looking up, in search of the star. Soon the three Magi will leave again, following the star that will lead them before a girl with her baby in her arms.

Herod asks them to return and show him the whereabouts of the new King, so that he can go and honour him. But his face, which Arcabas describes in a masterful way, says something else. He speaks of the fear of being supplanted, of losing his power; He speaks of the terror of being killed by those who want to take his place, because this is what he himself has done.

And so that being with a face as expressionless as a skull, with fixed eyes and an icy expression, when he discovers that the Magi have not returned to him, will make a terrible decision, to save himself and his power: he will order the death of all the children of Bethlehem.

### **The Magi summoned by Herod**

*Oil painting on canvas*

Malines (Belgium)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the Gospel according to Matthew (2, 1-12)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, some wise men came from the east to Jerusalem and said, "Where is he who has been born, the king of the Jews? We have seen his star rise and we have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and with him all Jerusalem. And all the chief priests and scribes of the people were assembled, and inquired from them as to the place where Christ was to be born. They said to him, "To Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what is written through the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem, the land of Judah, you are not the least of the principal cities of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly summoned the Magi, and asked them to tell him exactly the time when the star had appeared, and sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and inquire carefully about the child, and when you have found him, let me know, so that I may come and worship him." When they heard the king, they departed. And behold, the star, which they had seen rising, went before them, until it came and stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they felt great joy. When they entered the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then they opened their caskets and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they returned to their country by another road.



LET'S PRAY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

Let us pray together, saying:  
*We long to meet you, Lord.*

Like the Magi, we want to keep our eyes on the sky to search for your star. **Rit.**

Raising our eyes to the sky does not mean looking far away, but training ourselves to see what is extraordinary in our daily lives. **Rit.**

Accept our desire for you and enlarge our hearts, so that in our lives we can make room for you, and for our brothers and sisters. **Rit.**



SATURDAY, JANUARY 6



## ... It's Christmas!

Many Christians in the world, in Italy and also in our Diocese are celebrating “our” Christmas today, January 7. It's the same party. With different dates. And here the “we” is inclusive!

There are people who, even in our communities, while sharing the same faith and being part of the same Catholic Church, use different calendars. These are the Christian communities that follow the Julian calendar: among these there are almost all the Catholic communities of the Eastern rite, more than 20, divided into five different groups: Coptic, Western Syriac, Maronite, Eastern Syriac, Byzantine, Armenian, Ge'ez. In Bergamo there has been a Catholic community of the Ge'ez rite (Eritreans and Ethiopians) for many years. The Ukrainian Catholic community of Bergamo, on the other hand, of the Byzantine rite, celebrates according to the Gregorian calendar as in our parishes on 25.

We therefore invite our parishes NOT to extinguish the Christmas spirit and the exchange of greetings on January 6th, but to “leave the lights on”: in Bergamo there are many people who celebrate Christmas on this day! Let us pray for and with them! Let us become capable of seizing in the plurality of rites and calendars an opportunity to recognize each other and celebrate together.

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