

## Advent Bible Study

*The Light of Grace*

Dec. 2 Session I

Hope: Zechariah

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

Advent is a time of hope and waiting.

For centuries your people waited in hope for the Messiah to come.

We have seen that hope fulfilled in Jesus' birth,  
in his saving death and triumphant resurrection.

Yet now we too wait in hope.

During this Advent season,

we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth,

but we also look forward to his Second Advent.

Lead us to live in hope

and to share that hope with others

so that they too may come to worship Jesus as Lord.

Amen.

What is Hope?

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Christian hope is "the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1817).

ENCYCLICAL LETTER: *SPE SALVI* by: BENEDICT XVI

*"SPE SALVI facti sumus"* —in hope we were saved.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were "without hope and without God in the world" (*Eph* 2:12). The Ephesians, before their encounter with Christ, were without hope because they were "without God in the world". To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope. We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God. The example of a saint of our time can to some degree help us understand what it means to have a real encounter with this God for the first time. I am thinking of the African Josephine Bakhita, canonized by Pope John Paul II. She was born around 1869—she herself did not know the precise date—in Darfur in Sudan. At the age of nine, she

was kidnapped by slave-traders, beaten till she bled, and sold five times in the slave-markets of Sudan. Eventually she found herself working as a slave for the mother and the wife of a general, and there she was flogged every day till she bled; as a result of this she bore 144 scars throughout her life. Finally, in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant for the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who returned to Italy as the Mahdists advanced. Here, after the terrifying “masters” who had owned her up to that point, Bakhita came to know a totally different kind of “master” —in Venetian dialect, which she was now learning, she used the name “*paron*” for the living God, the God of Jesus Christ. Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now, however, she heard that there is a “*paron*” above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her — that he actually loved her. She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme “*Paron*”, before whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for her “at the Father’s right hand”. Now she had “hope” —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.” Through the knowledge of this hope she was “redeemed”, no longer a slave, but a free child of God. She understood what Paul meant when he reminded the Ephesians that previously they were without hope and without God in the world —without hope *because* without God. Hence, when she was about to be taken back to Sudan, Bakhita refused; she did not wish to be separated again from her “*Paron*”. On 9 January 1890, she was baptized and confirmed and received her first Holy Communion from the hands of the Patriarch of Venice. On 8 December 1896, in Verona, she took her vows in the Congregation of the Canossian Sisters and from that time onwards, besides her work in the sacristy and in the porter’s lodge at the convent, she made several journeys round Italy in order to promote the missions: the liberation that she had received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ, she felt she had to extend, it had to be handed on to others, to the greatest possible number of people. The hope born in her which had “redeemed” her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody.

Isaiah 51:1-5

Romans 5:1-5

Luke 1:5 -7, 13-25, 67-79