

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

2020



Sacred Heart Community, Lexington, Massachusetts

Dedication



Sacred Heart Advent Banners, Cycle B – The Prophets

This year's booklet is dedicated
to the many parishioners
serving our parish during the hardships and
isolation imposed by COVID-19.

Their dedication and willingness to give
of their time, talent, and treasure
has enriched all our lives and supported
Sacred Heart's ability
to serve our community and
Christian Service missions.

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November 29, 2020
First Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B, 64:2-7; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37



Marc Chagall. America Windows. The Art Institute of Chicago. 1977.

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!... while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways.” Isaiah 64:1, 3, 5

This first reading from Isaiah feels spot-on for our situation today. It was written at the time when the Israelites returned from captivity and found everything a mess--cities destroyed, the Temple gone, the economy wrecked. A seemingly hopeless need to reconstruct and make things right. Please, God, rend the heavens and come down and rescue us!!

Yes, God, we need you to come down and save us, too, to show us the right ways. And we hope that when you come, you will find us doing the right things--caring for our neighbors, not just here but around the world, aware of our own sinfulness and need for forgiveness. “Help us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.” (Psalm 80:18)

And if we watch, as the Gospel tells us, we will see God’s face--in God’s people, the work of God’s hands. And we will, with Paul, know God’s faithfulness in calling us to fellowship with his son Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:9)

Gracious God, help me to trust in your love and faithfulness for all the people of our turbulent world. Help me to reflect that love and faithfulness in my daily life. Amen.

~Sister Mary Lyman

November 30, 2020
Feast of Saint Andrew, Apostle
Romans 10:9-18; Psalm 19:8-11; Matthew 4:18-22



Duccio di Buoninsegna, Sienese. The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew. 1308/1311

“As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.” Matthew 4:18-22

In this passage all four men immediately respond to a request from Jesus to follow him. James and his brother John, who were with their father, did not ask for their father’s advice. All four men did not ask for or try to negotiate details. They just followed Jesus. People who respond this way must really want something and are waiting for the time to act to obtain it. They believed Jesus was the leader and teacher they were waiting for. They understood themselves and had enough confidence in themselves to act decisively.

Lord, help me to understand myself and have confidence in my judgment. Help us to determine what we really want and are waiting for, so when you give the word that the time to act has arrived, we will respond with faith and effectiveness. Amen

~Elaine Quinlan

December 1, 2020
Tuesday of the First Week of Advent
Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Luke 10:21-24



Hiroji Kubota. Kuroshima Catholic Church--Descendants of Hidden Christians. Sasebo, Nagasaki. 2001.

“The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and understanding; a spirit of counsel and strength...” Isaiah 11: 2

If we ever needed “a spirit of wisdom and understanding,” it is now during this pandemic. As we begin our journey through Advent to Christmas, let us gain the wisdom to know what is being asked of us, the understanding to do what is right, and the strength to take that appropriate action.

Mary and Joseph endured much hardship in order to bring Jesus, our Savior, to life. Many of us are enduring hardships in order to keep us and others safe and healthy. We are being asked to endure social isolation, not being able to worship together, not being able to see family, sickness, grief, job and income loss, and much anxiety about our country.

By reflecting on Jesus’ sacrifice, we can gain strength and resolve to focus on how we can help ourselves by helping others. Through prayer, we can allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. This may be a good time to deepen our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, to listen to God through prayer with an open heart, trusting in His will.

Trusting in God’s plan helps us to expand our capacity for love. We no longer feel the need for excessive control, anxieties are calmed, we find opportunities for prayer and presence, and we become mindful of our needs and the needs of others.

Dear God, let us get closer to you through your Son, Jesus. He knew joy, suffering, fear, helplessness, and dependence upon only one thing: Your will. In Jesus, let us find a friend, mentor, teacher, and healer and put our trust in Him during this difficult time. Amen.

~Pauline Burke

December 2, 2020
Wednesday of the First Week of Advent
Isaiah 25:6-10A; Psalm 23:1-6; Matthew 15:29-37



Michael Christopher Brown. Makeshift Catholic Services near Airport. Central African Republic, Bangui. 2014

Psalm 23, is one of my favorite psalms. When my girls were little, we would read this together from their “Children’s First Prayer” book, which had the most angelic drawings.

Back then and still today, whenever I read this psalm, I start slowly with intention: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want; In verdant pastures he gives me repose; Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.”* How peaceful! I imagine a glorious sunny day, with lush green all around me, being lulled by the gentle water flowing past me.

Then when I get to the part, *“Even though I walk in the dark valley,”* I automatically start reading faster (danger); but then my intonation slows almost to a halt, and I articulate every word: *“for you are at my side.”*

Then comes the most difficult part for me: *“You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes.”* I say this lightning fast, thinking maybe then it won’t happen. For some reason, I don’t feel the protection from the previous lines; and I wonder why I am sitting there in front of my adversaries (or some adversity). It seems to take ages, but finally I do relax; and when I do, I feel your blessings, *“You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”*

As it says in Ecclesiastes 3:2: *“To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot ...”*

Lord, help us to calmly and confidently take every situation (and phase in life) in stride, knowing you are always with us. Amen.

~Renee Steinbrecher

December 3, 2020
Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest
Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27A; Matthew 7:21, 24-27



Capuchos Convent, Entrance to the Hermitage of Our Lord of Gethsemane, Sintra, Portugal. 1560.
Fresco of Saint Francis of Assisi to the left of the door. 18th century.

“Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock.” Isaiah 26:4

In Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus tells His disciples, "Everyone who listens to these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." The rains, and floods and winds came, but the house did not collapse. So it is with our faith. If our faith is based on the words of Jesus, it becomes our bedrock and our foundation of faith in Christ. And Jesus goes further: not only do we need to listen to the words of Jesus; we must act on them. We must hear the word of God, and act to be ever more God-like. We are people of faith and people of action.

Today is my patron saints' day, Saint Francis Xavier, a Spanish priest and founder of the Jesuits, who proselytized throughout Asia in the 1500s (India, Japan, and Indonesia). I am always in awe of his life, giving up the comforts of a Christian life in Europe, and instead exchanging his comfort for a life of expanding the faith to the far reaches of the world. St. Francis Xavier lived a life of action, of bringing the word of Christ to different countries.

What actions do I take to bring the word of Christ to those that do not know it yet, or need it to be strengthened in times of rain, floods, and winds? How strong is my foundation of faith, and what am I doing to strengthen my faith?

Dear Lord, let me hear Your Word clearly, let me strengthen my foundation of faith, and let me turn to action to help spread Your Word . Amen.

~Frank Schapfel

December 4, 2020
Friday of the First Week of Advent
Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; Matthew 9:27-31



Nicolas Poussin. Christ Healing the Blind of Jericho (Christ Healing the Sick).1650.

“On that day, the deaf shall hear, the eyes of the blind shall see. The lowly will ever find joy, the poor will rejoice.” Isaiah 29:18-19

“As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him...” Matthew 9:27

If these men were blind, how did they know that Jesus was passing by? How did they follow Jesus if they could not see him? Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” But did you notice that scripture doesn't say that the men actually asked him to cure them, only to have mercy? I believe Jesus knew their hearts were open to him. Jesus knew they were seeking him. Jesus knew they were blind and wanted to see. Jesus knew they had faith in him. They were given sight because of that faith.

We can do the same! We can be followers of Jesus even though we don't see him. We can believe that he can heal us (of our sins and anything keeping us from being spiritually healthy). Shouldn't we open our hearts to him and seek him like the blind men? Let us follow him expectantly, despite our blindness and have faith, knowing he **will** “open our eyes.”

Dear Lord, I am blind and asking for sight. I am deaf and needing my ears to be open. I am lowly and in need of joy. I am a sinner and in need of your mercy and forgiveness. Yes Lord, I believe you can do this! Amen!

~Maureen Gaines

December 5, 2020
Saturday of the First Week of Advent
Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26; Psalm 147:1-6; Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5-8



Fernando Moleres. A Roman Catholic Nun Gives Baptism Training. Juba, South Sudan, 2010.

“At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.’” Matthew 9:36-38

This year has been a challenge for most of us. We have watched our nation struggle with the pandemic, a tumultuous election year, and the social unrest caused by racial injustice. Many of us have experienced the impact of disease, the anxiety of the election, or the sorrow of injustice personally. In many ways, we may resemble the crowds which moved Jesus to pity. We are troubled and, at times, feel abandoned. We have felt victimized.

In this gospel Matthew challenges us with the mission of the Apostles. We cannot simply remain passive victims. He calls on us to take action, to help where we can in our family, our community, our world. It must be our mission to ease the troubles of those we encounter – a grandchild grappling with remote learning, an elderly neighbor isolated by social distancing, a homeless person seeking shelter and sustenance. Our time, talent, and treasure are all the authority we need to help bring the abundant harvest Jesus promised to those who need it most.

Dear Lord, please help us to hear the call of the Master of the Harvest. Please help us to know how we can employ our labor to bring the harvest of your mercy to those most in need. Amen.

~Laurie Fiola

December 6, 2020
Second Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:9-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8



Sandro Botticelli. The Annunciation. 1489.

“...what sort of persons ought you to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...” 2 Peter 3:11-12

Each year, we experience the season of Advent, the time of Waiting. Waiting can have two paths: First, there is the whole idea of expecting...we are waiting for Christmas, the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus, God among us.

But the second understanding of “waiting for” is more of a challenge to each of us, and then all of us as church: What are we waiting for to be able to get started living the teachings of Jesus, both as individuals and as communities? God has acted and continues to act. Now it is time for us to act.

That is the Advent challenge: What will set us free to be able to live our lives as Jesus has asked us to do? Following Jesus is not a checklist; rather it is a way of life. So the challenging question for each of us during this Advent time is: What do we need to do to get started, to deepen our following of the teachings of Jesus?

And as we ask and re-ask the question of ourselves, we remember that we are not alone in that answering: it is in the companionship of friends, family, and community that we explore and live the answer to the question.

Loving God, please give us the grace and energy to stop waiting and to get started and restarted living your teachings. As individuals and as community, may we support one another and never give up. Amen.

~Sister Ruth Rosenbaum, TC

December 7, 2020
Memorial of Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church
Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 5:17-26



Werner Bischof. Mass Celebrated during Holy Week. Peru, 1954

*Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak.
Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Isaiah 35:3-4A*

There is a lot to be frightened about these days: a divided and viciously polarizing political climate, human-induced climate change that threatens the wellbeing of all who inhabit the earth, and a pandemic that has caused worldwide sickness and misery.

I have often found times when I despair of the way things are today, but then I remember that God has guided us through many dark and discouraging times since the time of Isaiah, and that the only requirement is that we have faith and believe.

The people of Israel were enduring troubling times with wars and persecutions and were thirsty for justice and hope.

In today's reading Isaiah promises us that the desert will exult, rejoice with joyful song, and bloom with flowers, and that sorrow and mourning will flee.

*Oh Lord, give me strength to fear not and to believe in your justice; give me the vision to be optimistic and hopeful in the face of discouragement, and help me to encourage those around me.
Amen.*

~John Keller

December 8, 2020
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38



Fra Angelico. Annunciation. 1440-1445.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.... Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.” Luke 1:30-31, 38

Our Lord God, in His utmost kindness, had the Angel Gabriel proclaim to a young Jewish girl that she would give birth to a son. A virgin, Mary, heard the Angel declare that she was filled with Grace, so she ought not to fear, for the Lord had found favor in her, and she would bear Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. In awe, the Mother of our Savior trusted the Angel’s words.

For me, trust is a difficult word. My own mother, who died of Covid earlier this year, didn’t really have my trust and was ill equipped to be a good mother, through no fault of her own. The Virgin Mary and women, my friends, who look to her in trust, represent Mother to me. Through them, I am able to trust that God continues to guide me in raising my own children, knowing the everlasting love of Jesus. For this gift, I am truly thankful and surely blessed.

God of Infinite love, You have given us a true example of trust in your handmaid, the Virgin Mary. With Mary in mind, we turn to You to hear your Words and trust in You always. Amen.

~Misha Peterson

December 9, 2020
Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent
Isaiah 40:25-31; Psalm 103:1-4, 8 and 10; Matthew 11:28-30



Jules Breton. The Rest. 1864

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.... For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” -- Matthew 11: 28-30

When I saw Matthew’s gospel today and heard God’s invitation to come to Him, because his burden is light, I did a double-take. I realize Jesus is God, and therefore he can do all things; however, his message and his job are the most difficult in all of creation. But because He is so good at what he does (being God), He makes his message to us simple: Not a big deal, He tells us. Cut through the nonsense; just come to Me, “all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

That is such a reassuring message, especially during a pandemic: Put your trust in God, and He will help you! You are in good hands; God won’t abandon you. Believe in Him, and you will get what you need.

But what if we don’t know what we need, and what we want? What if all we have are questions, not answers? What if, as humans, we are unable to see God for who He is, unable to ask for help, unwilling to put our faith in his hands? What if we fail at trusting him?

Not to worry, God says. That is the message from today’s gospel and readings. God knows all, does all. Don’t question. Just do as he says: “Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Lord, it’s not easy to put my trust in you, even though I believe I can, and know I must. I think it is I, not you, that I have a hard time trusting; I’ve let myself down so many times. Please help me to look beyond myself, and place my faith and trust in you. Amen.

~Nancy Keebler

December 10, 2020
Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto
Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 1:26-38



Saturnino Gatti. The Translation of the Holy House of Loreto. 1510.

“May it be done to me according to your word.” Luke 1:36-37

Just last year, Pope Francis declared December 10th a memorial to Our Lady of Loreto, named after the town of Loreto, Italy, the resting place of Mary’s ancestral home. The Faithful believe that her home was transported by angels from Nazareth, during the last days of the Crusades. In honor of her early use of air travel, Our Lady of Loreto is considered a protector of pilots and air travelers. But, she can provide inspiration during our own challenging times.

This has been a year of great suffering. Death, illness, natural disaster, political strife, economic hardship and racial discord have brought deep pain to many families and communities. Stress and isolation have led to disruption of marriages, friendships and support systems that might have survived in simpler times. Each of us strives to bear up, but compassion fatigue sets in and we find our responses disappointing. During these times of personal discouragement, the idea of Mary flying in atop her own Holy Home, lovingly attended by a crew of angels seems oddly comforting.

Some may choose Our Lady of Sorrows to meditate on during difficult times, but Our Lady of Loreto provides another approach. When I think of the Holy Mother perched on her roof, directing the family home across the Mediterranean Sea or cruising along the rocky Adriatic coast, it just makes me smile. When I envision her touching down in a Dalmatian village or setting down in an Anconan hill town, I imagine the views toward the sea and it lifts my spirits. One of the best things about being Catholic is that there is room for the fanciful. And when peace seems out of reach, a little humor and imagination offer a way back to our better selves.

Merciful God, help us to fill our homes with love, kindness and humor. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

~Kathryn Rapperport

December 11, 2020
Friday of the Second Week of Advent
Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1:1-4 and 6; Matthew 11:16-19



Robert Campin. Annunciation Triptych (Merode Altarpiece). 1427-32.

“I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go.”
Isaiah 48:17

I don't know about you, but I have a problem with this text. It seems to run counter to my usual way of doing things, which is basically to make my own decisions and hope for the best. I try to do what is right and moral, but is that enough? Probably not.

Too often I assume that whatever I want *must* be what is best for me (and everyone else involved). The factor that I too often leave out is God's perspective and His direction. I don't always take the time to ask Him to guide my thoughts and lead me on the *right* path, the one He has prepared for me.

When I look back at my life, I can see many missed opportunities, so many times when I made a choice based solely on my preferences. The good part is that it's never too late to change my way of thinking! The hasty choices of the past can't be undone, no matter how good or bad they turned out to be; but every day is a new opportunity to ask God for His help and direction, and for the patience to wait for His guidance.

Dear Lord, help me to trust you enough to ask for your wisdom and guidance, and give me the grace to be willing to wait for your answer. Amen.

~Becky Wilhoite

December 12, 2020
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
Zechariah 2:14-17; Judith 13:18-19; Luke 1:39-47



Domenico Ghirlandaio. Visitation. 1491.

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, 'Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" Luke 1:41-43

Though I am now a grandparent, I can close my eyes and remember the thrill that came with the first feel of a baby's kick, our baby's kick, within the mother's belly. I can feel the welling up of thoughts and dreams of what the birth portends and of the miracle which is life. There is the joy in contemplating the possibilities that come in the making of a family. It was a moment when worries of living were pushed aside by these wondrous shared feelings of hope.

The present is especially a time of storm clouds and daily anxiety and uncertainty. But this day, this event, should remind us that ahead lies the joy of Christmas, the coming of Jesus with the light and hope and guidance that he brings. If we lay our hand on the moment, we can sense that promise of what is to come, find the renewal to keep moving forward, and feel the approach of Christmas with its celebration of Jesus among us this year and every year. We can feel, too, the comfort of the Holy Spirit among us: past, present, and future.

O loving God, let us be open to feel each portent of the joy you offer. Let us each lift our eyes from present worries that trip us up to see the promise of the coming Jesus ahead. Let us welcome the Holy Spirit as our comfort as we journey. Amen.

~Dan McGrath

December 13, 2020
Third Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 61:1-2A, 10-11; Luke 1:46-50, 53-54;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28



Dieric Bouts the Elder. Altarpiece of the Virgin (Annunciation, Visitation, Adoration of the Angels, Adoration of the Magi). 1440s.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed. My soul rejoices in my God!” Luke 1:46-48 and Isaiah 61:10b

Each Sunday during Advent, we light a candle to represent the long-awaited period for the coming of Christ. Each candle represents a thousand years, with four candles on the Advent wreath representing 4,000 years of waiting time.

The rose candle on the Advent wreath today is a reminder for us to be joyful. Rose represents joy, whereas purple is for preparation and repentance. Before any great feast in the church’s celebration, we are given a season of preparation, with Advent for Christmas and Lent for Easter. We are also encouraged to take time to prepare our hearts to receive Christ every time we receive him in the Eucharist.

The birth of Christ changed everything for mankind, and the readings for this Sunday highlight the tremendous joy he brought into the world. The prophet Isaiah in the first reading says, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord”; St. Paul’s second reading reminds us to “rejoice always”; and the Blessed Mother’s words in the psalm praise God with her Magnificat prayer: “my soul rejoices in my God.”

Let’s imitate these great saints’ deep joy of knowing Christ, who is the source of life and love. It is indeed a great gift to know Christ, and we rejoice immensely at his presence with us. His life, death, and resurrection earned for us the gifts of the Holy Spirit with the power to transform us into love itself.

Lord, your goodness is deep as the ocean, and those who love you will see and rejoice and understand your loving kindness. We praise and thank you for coming into the world to bring us hope, peace, joy, and love. Never permit us to be separated from you. Amen.

~Lucy Prunier

December 14, 2020
Memorial of Saint John of the Cross,
Priest and Doctor of the Church
Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17A; Psalm 25:4-9; Matthew 21:23-27



John Bates Bedford. Nathan and David. 18??

*“Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.”* Psalm 25:4-5AB

It’s satisfying to think about our deep knowledge, our many accomplishments, the incredible skills we’ve mastered, and how very right we are about so many things, isn’t it? We feel in control and in command of our piece of the world as we use our knowledge, accomplishments, skills, and rightness to make sense of people and events.

King David, the author of this psalm, must surely have felt that same satisfaction. After all, he was the conquering king of Israel, with every earthly power in his grasp! He was chosen by Samuel, though he was the youngest of all his brothers; he killed Goliath the Philistine; he conquered Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city; he united Israel and Judah; he prepared for his son Solomon to build the Temple. Yet in this psalm he focuses on how much he needs to learn the ways of the Lord and how he relies utterly on God for his salvation. He knows that he owes everything to God. His humility before the Lord shines through.

If David, God’s own anointed, needed to learn God’s ways and truths, how much more do I need to be guided? My competence, despite my pride in it, is nothing compared to God’s, so I need God to make the way known to me. The more I seek to learn God’s paths, the more I can rest in confidence that God will be beside me always.

O Lord, help me to constantly seek your guidance and listen to your teachings. Remind me always to put my trust and confidence in you – your ways, your paths, your truths – for you are my God and my savior. Amen.

~Lorie Lucke

December 15, 2020
Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent
Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Psalm 24:2-3, 6-7, 17-19 and 23;
Matthew 21:28-32



Mikkel Ostergaard. 13-year-old Meshesa Mekaya prepares a field for planting. Ethiopia, 2008.

“The [first] son said in reply, ‘I will not’ ... [the other] son said in reply, “Yes, sir,” but did not go.” Mt 21: 29, 30

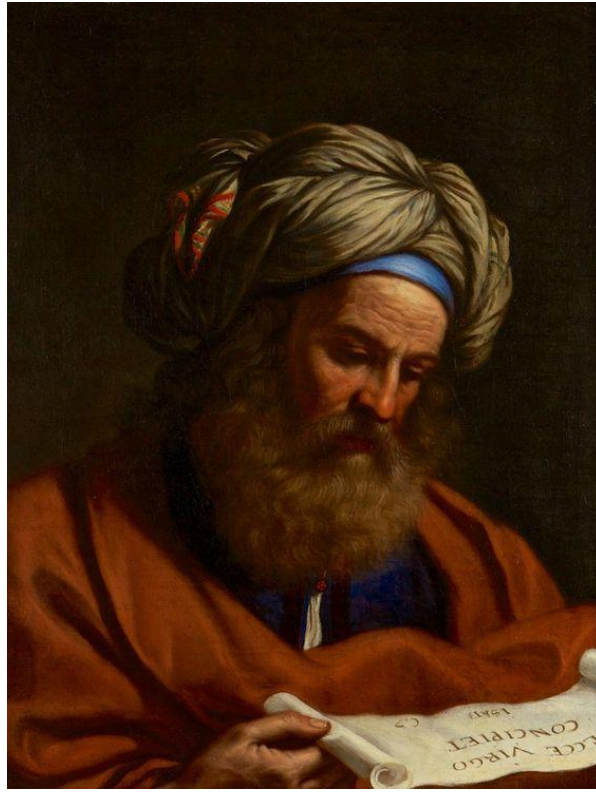
Our God is a god of second chances. Like tax collectors and prostitutes, if you sincerely come to believe, regardless of what preceded it in your life, you shall be given entrance into the Kingdom of God. Even if, like the first son in Jesus’ question to the chief priests and elders, you initially refuse outright to do God’s work, or (perhaps more common) even refuse to seek what God is asking you to do, you can still later change, belatedly honoring the father who asked his sons to work in his vineyard. Neither son could have pleased their father in how they responded.

The work in his vineyard which we are asked by the Father to do is not mandatory, and it may not even be obvious what the Father wants. But it is certain that our God wants each of us in the vineyard working to accomplish His ends.

Dear Father, do not look on my sin of refusing to do the work you ask of me. I am ashamed of my refusal, and I praise and thank you for accepting my efforts, tainted as they are by my usual initial refusal. Amen.

~Dick Van Wert

December 16, 2020
Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent
Isaiah 45:6C-8, 18, 21C-25; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 7:18B-23



Benedetto Gennari il Giovane The Prophet Isaiah. Year?

“There is no just and saving God but me. Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth, for I am God; there is no other!” Isaiah 45: 21-22

Isaiah’s prophecies seem as relevant today as when he wrote them. His writings were compiled during a turbulent time for the people of God. Isaiah reminds his people to put their faith in God rather than a particular political power, as they wait for the rivalries and turmoil to pass. He calls on them to remember that God’s justice will prevail.

As I begin to prepare for the Christmas season during the political and health turmoil we face, I am comforted by Isaiah’s message of hope. God wants us to feel cared for and safe in the knowledge that there is a just future. We are called to put our trust in Him. This is not always easy for me. I want to “do something,” and “fix things.” I must work at being patient, and trusting in God, and waiting to see how God’s plan unfolds.

I am reminded of a talk Father Len O’Malley gave at Sacred Heart several years ago. He spoke of the importance of faith and community. He spoke of the importance and care of the Sacred Heart community for him during a particular time in his life. I often think of his closing remark, “All will be well.”

God, give me the patience and courage to put my trust and faith in You as we wait for a time of peace and justice. Amen.

~Debbie Cunha

December 17, 2020
Thursday of the Third Week of Advent
Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72:1-4 7-8, 17; Matthew 1:1-17



Girolamo Genga. A Jesse-Tree. 1535.

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ...” Matthew 1:1

In today's gospel we read the genealogy of Jesus through his adoptive father, Joseph. Admittedly, it's not the most exciting scripture passage; but it's important information to know. In it we are shown the names from Jesus' ancestry. Some of their stories have been retold throughout the pages of the bible. Here are just a few:

- ◇ **Jacob**, who stole his older brother's birthright
- ◇ **Tamar**, who tricked her father-in-law into sleeping with her
- ◇ **Rahab**, a prostitute and a Gentile
- ◇ **Ruth**, who was a Gentile
- ◇ **King David**, who was an adulterer and a murderer
- ◇ **King Manasseh**, who promoted idolatry and other evil doings

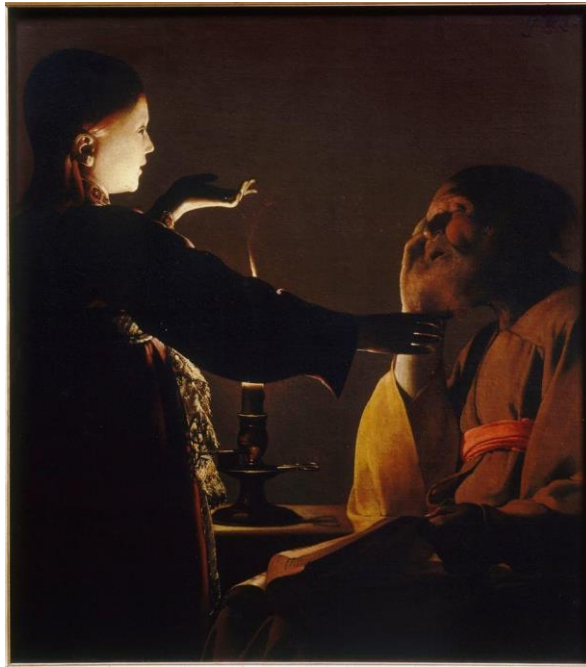
What insight can we gain from knowing the lineage of Jesus? We see that God can use sinners and outcasts, holy and unholy people to accomplish His purpose and plan. God is all-inclusive; he doesn't just include aristocrats and people of power in his family. God can and will use our simple lives for great significance according to his plan. No one is beyond the reach of Jesus' saving power.

Jesus is both the descendant and the creator of all these people. He is the end and the beginning, the Alpha and the Omega.

Heavenly Father, help us to trust and know that you have placed each of us right where we belong. Bless our families: those related by blood and those brought to us by love. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

~Eunice Laffey

December 18, 2020
Friday of the Third Week of Advent
Jeremiah 23:5-8; Psalm 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19; Matthew 1:18-25



George de la Tour. The Angel Appearing to Saint Joseph. First Half 17th Century.

“ . . . the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’” Matthew 1:20-21

Among the amazing and beautiful moments leading to the birth of Christ, Joseph’s compassion, faith, and courage stand out as he established his role in the birth of Christ. It is difficult to imagine the emotions Joseph must have felt as he tried to understand that his wife-to-be was expecting a child. As a righteous man, he likely felt compassion as he decided to divorce Mary quietly rather than expose her to shame. Upon the angel speaking to him in a dream, Joseph clearly invoked his faith as he contemplated acting upon the angel’s instructions. Ultimately, Joseph’s courage, buttressed by his faith, gave him the strength to take Mary into his home and remain with her as Christ came into the world, notwithstanding what others in the community may have been saying or thinking about both Joseph and Mary leading up to Christ’s birth.

In life, we are confronted with many challenges that require us to invoke our compassion, faith, and courage when deciding how to address the situation we are facing. We hope that, in those times, we too can demonstrate the compassion, faith, and courage that Joseph demonstrated by responding in a way that is emblematic of our Christian spirit and values. As we approach Christmas and the New Year, we can reflect upon the compassion, faith, and courage of Joseph and strive to incorporate the principles ingrained in those qualities into our own lives.

Lord, please grant me the compassion, faith, and courage to follow the path you have set before me, that I may demonstrate these qualities as I endeavor to be a light for your children. Amen.

~John O’Neill

December 19, 2020
Saturday of the Third Week of Advent
Judges 13:2-7, 24-25A; Psalm 71:3-6, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25



Michael Christopher Brown. Sunday Service at Notre Dame Catholic Church in Bangui, Central African Republic. March 2014.

“My mouth will be filled with your praise, and I will sing your glory. I will treat of the mighty works of the Lord; Oh God, I will tell of your singular justice. Oh God, you have taught me from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds.” Psalm 71:16-17

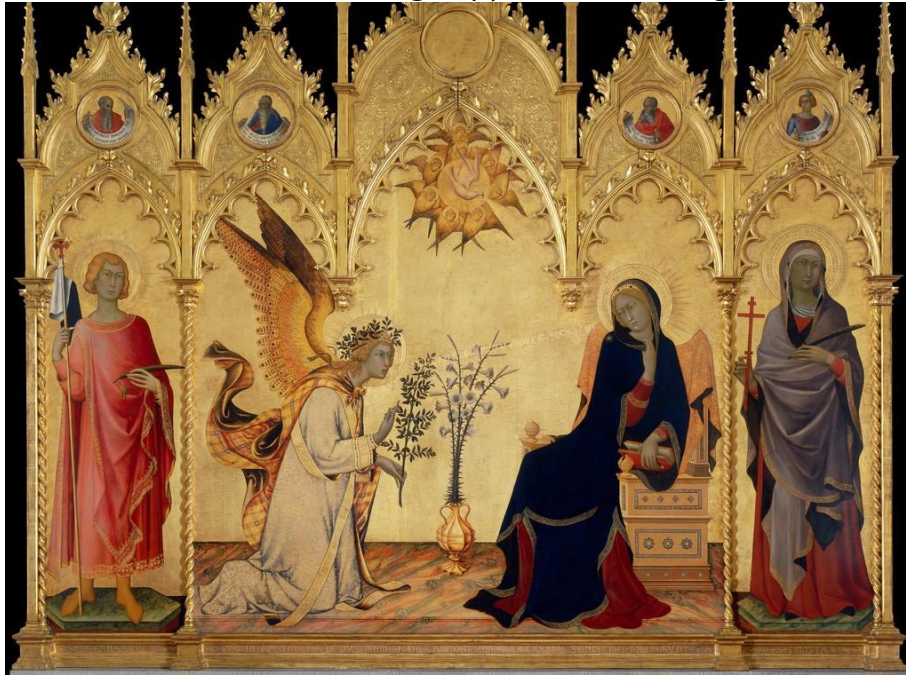
These readings are harbingers of peace coming to a world full of fear and anxiety. Advent reveals to us God’s promise of Hope and reminds us to believe in the miracle of a perfect love—one that will cast out all fear and comfort all suffering. Advent year 2020 is indeed challenging—with a resurgence of this deadly pandemic, political and social divisiveness, and economic uncertainty for many—we are greatly in need of a sanctuary of mind and body. Through the liturgy of Advent prayer, God sends this timeless message of hope and harmony to salve our troubled souls, and to engender the courage to help us to act with fairness and charity, with grace and self control, and above all, to be kind to each other as we confront these difficulties.

These readings remind us to rejoice in the knowledge that we know love and are loved. Our God offers sanctuary in this love. Acting like Jesus taught us, we will find God in each other when we treat each person with dignity and respect. When we allow for each other’s humanity, we act justly and will love our neighbor as Jesus instructs us to do. We are thus moved by the Spirit to exalt God’s love and express our gratitude in joyfulness and praise.

Our Gracious God, You are the wellspring of Justice and Peace. We thank you for your constant presence of love. Protect us from the ugliness of systemic violence and hate; inoculate us from infection and anxiety. Give us the courage and dedication to become our best selves, one safe and loving nation, under your just and peaceful guidance. Amen.

~Jennifer Charles

December 20, 2020
Fourth Sunday of Advent
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29;
Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38



Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi. Sant'Ansano Altarpiece. 1333.
(Annunciation with Saints Ansanus and Margaret and Prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Daniel).

“For nothing will be impossible for God.” Luke 1: 37

Mary, a humble young girl from the margins of society, is invited to partner with God in an event that would change our relationship with our Creator. Her first response is fear, then disbelief, then trust in the power of the Most High to fulfill God’s plan. She said “Yes,” and the rest is history. “For nothing will be impossible for God.”

During this Advent of 2020, like Mary, we can feel overwhelmed by the challenges of our time: rampant COVID, racial unrest, political turmoil, lost jobs and homes, and climate-stocked wildfires and hurricanes. We are uncertain about what we can do. Solutions seem impossible. But God breaks through into our reality, perhaps through the voices of “angels” in our lives asking us to be God’s hands and feet. As St. Teresa of Avila says: “Christ has no body now but yours.....”

Our challenge is to forge a more just society by our actions. We are often called to the margins of society by our actions. We are often called to the margins of society where God’s power and grace may surprise us. Through our participation in community, we realize that we are not alone in our task of making God’s kingdom come on Earth. We are in this together. Where is God calling us now? Will we say “yes”? Remember, “nothing will be impossible for God.”

God of Love, may we respond as Mary did to your call, making Jesus the center of our lives. May we be Christ’s hands and feet as we join with our brothers and sisters to dismantle unjust systems that harm God’s people and God’s Creation.

~Sr. Marie-Therese “Tess” and Fran Ludwig

December 21, 2020
Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent
Song of Songs 2:8-14; Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Luke 1:39-45^[OBJ]



Claude Monet. Poplars. 1891.

“For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard in our land.” Song of Songs 2:11-12

My thoughts go to the seasons: the seasons of life, the seasons of faith, the seasons of the ash tree. In winter, the branches are bare. In spring, buds appear. In summer, the long thin leaflets fan and form a canopy of green. In autumn, those leaves fall and blanket the earth. In Irish mythology the ash tree is the World Tree that spans between the realms, with its branches reaching into the heavens and its roots into the underworld. Its branches are as high as its roots are deep. The ash is a sacred tree with magic: the magic of life, the magic of hope, the magic of faith.

As we near the shortest day of the year, when dark hours are longest, it's a good time to remind myself of the importance of faith, of hope, of light, of life. And to believe in the presence of our Lord in the face of Mother Earth in winter, spring, summer, and fall: In winter's time for our roots to draw nutrients; in early spring for our unopened buds to face the sun; in summer for our canopy of faith to rejoice; and in fall for our love to blanket those around us. I'm grateful for the reminder that my faith is like the seasons, and that I need to observe more and reflect.

O Lord with the face of Mother Earth, guide me with your teachings and your presence to be more like the ash tree - reaching out and deep to be a better person. Amen.

~ Judy Blanco, sister of Debbie Cunha

December 22, 2020
Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent
1 Samuel 1:24-28; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-8; Luke 1:46-56



Fra Angelico. Annunciation. 1440.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.” Luke 1:46

Magnificat ánima mea Dóminum. When I was in college, I could recite the Magnificat in Latin (actually, I still can). My college Glee Club opened our annual Christmas Vespers concert processing into a darkened chapel carrying candles chanting the Magnificat. It was always my favorite part of the entire concert. And, I had no idea what I was actually singing. It took years for me to sit down with the Latin and English, compare them and ponder the meaning.

Last year, my son Andrew had to write a reflection on the Magnificat for his religion class. (Thank you, BC High!) We talked about Mary. How old do you think she was? How do you think she felt being asked to be Jesus’ mother? Do you think she was scared? Would you say yes to God? Would you express great joy in your role and great confidence in God? How would you respond to such a request? Maybe equally important, how do you respond to God? Are you listening to what God is saying to you? Would you say yes to God?

O God, help me to listen carefully to hear your voice. Help me to discern what is your will for me. Give me the courage to say yes. Amen.

~Anita Shine

December 23, 2020
Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10 and 14; Luke 1:57-66



Raphael. Virgin and Child with Infant Saint John the Baptist and a Child Saint. 1504-1505.

“Thus says the Lord God. Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.” Malachi 3:1

With Christmas just a couple of days away, this week’s Gospel reading portends the coming of the prophet, John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. The Advent season is one of preparation. I was intrigued with the story of how John came to be named and how this fit with the message of hope and redemption. In researching the meaning of the name John I discovered it means “God is gracious.”

In the Gospel, Elizabeth, previously barren and seemingly past child birth age, is given the gracious gift of a child. It was assumed that the child would be named after his father, Zachariah; but when asked, Zachariah, previously mute, called out “the child’s name shall be John.” Through God’s grace, he is sending all of us the ultimate Christmas gift, Jesus.

This reminds me that especially at this time of year, I need to reflect on all the gifts God has bestowed on me and my family. It reminds me to be thankful each day for God’s gracious gifts and to pay that forward to others. I am reminded that God calls all of us to be prophets. We honor him in the way we live our lives and follow his example.

God, help me to appreciate the gracious gifts you have given me, and help me strive to live a life of prayer. Amen.

~Barry Cunha

December 24, 2020
The Nativity of the Lord
Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalm 96:1-3, 11-13; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14



Bastiano Mainardi. Nativity. Late 15th-early 16th century

“Do not be afraid; I proclaim to you good news of great joy...for today...a savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord,... Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!!” Luke 2:10-11, 14

Plagues and pestilence were not unknown to the Old Testament people of God. The Hebrews forded oceans, wandered in the desert, and were smitten by assaults from Egypt, Babylon, Rome, and others over many generations. Through all of this, they listened to their prophets, built their temples, and passed their faith on to future generations. They listened to and understood the Commandments from God. There were dark days in abundance, but they managed to look beyond their present to see salvation and hear the good news. They looked above the fray to Mount Sinai and beyond.

In our present condition we can understand the plight of the Hebrews. Our plague is mighty and has ensnared the entire world. God help us all. Wars are common in many places in the world. God bless the peacemakers.

During all of this, we can call upon our past where the people of God persevered and remained Faithful, imbued with Hope and full of Love. In these times, we may need to call upon one of the virtues that is particularly pertinent to our current events. God has and will continue to give us reason to hope. Christmastide is a time to dwell on the best of all good news. God is with us and will help us through our passing plight. Most importantly, God will welcome us to eternal life after we have traversed the fragility of our present life and will call us to be ‘happy with God forever in heaven.’ Hope in the Lord!

May the Good News of Christmas inspire us all to increase in Faith, Hope, and Love to heal our troubled world and lead us to life eternal in the presence of the God of Love. Amen.

~Neil Hegarty



Nativity. Fra Angelico.

The Politics of Love

We will celebrate the great holyday of Christmas. Technically, we call this the Feast of the Incarnation. In the birth of Jesus, God who is pure Spirit takes on human flesh and becomes one with all of humanity. God, who is Love, is incarnate in Jesus, our Savior and our brother. God is the life-force behind all of creation. This life-force is pure energy, pure Love.

The mystery of Christmas is really overwhelming. Our gift giving is a pale imitation of the gift that is ours in Jesus. Our Christmas lights burn brightly but are no match for the Light of the World. As great as our Christmas celebrations may be, they are dwarfed by the ecstasy that is ours when we experience our unity with the Risen Christ.

This year the pandemic will temper our celebrations, our gift-giving and even the decorations that are so much a part of this great feast. What it will not do is lessen in any way the significance of what we celebrate. The message of Christmas is a message of love, solidarity and peace. If anything, this pandemic has brought home the clear understanding that we are truly connected with one another. Covid-19 has "... revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all." (Pope Francis: Fratelli Tutti 32) We wear our masks primarily to protect each other; secondarily, to protect ourselves.

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. This is not a synonym for heaven but a vision of a world transformed by love. As members of a worldwide community, the care and compassion that we provide to one another, nation to nation, creates the kind of peace that is essential to economic growth and development. Pope Francis speaks of this as the politics of love. "For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity." (FT 180)

The season of Advent has flown by as it always does. We will all struggle to make Christmas what it needs to be. This pandemic, however, will keep us in doors and away from the traditional busyness of other years. And herein may be a great opportunity to enter more fully into the spirituality of this sacred time. What our nation needs most at this moment is the kind of healing that will enable us to move beyond the rancor and divisiveness of our recent election. Reconciliation, openness, honesty and sincerity are only possible if we recognize the power of love, the energy of love, the reality of Love who is God, who is Jesus, born 2000 years ago but who is with us today as our guiding light and our faithful companion.

~Msgr. Paul V. Garrity

Appreciation



Gentile da Fabriano. The Journey and Adoration of the Magi. 1423

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who have enriched our Advent journey,
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