In Mary-Darkness

I live my Advent in the womb of Mary
And on one night when a great star swings free
From its high mooring and walks down the sky
To be the dot above the Christus i,
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith’s walled place,

With hope’s expectance of nativity.
I knew for long she carried me and fed me,
Guarded and loved me, though I could not see,
But only now, with inward jubilee,
I come upon earth’s most amazing knowledge:
Someone is hidden in this dark with me.

By Jessica Powers
First Week of Advent
Sunday, December 1, 2013
First Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Is 2: 1-5; Rom. 13: 11-14; Mt. 24: 37-44
See Readings

We begin Advent, a season of hopeful expectation. Stores have been advertising Christmas for weeks by now. The warm memories of family gatherings, the endearing Nativity stories, and the bustle of preparation all swirl around us. In the deep, cold darkness of December, we surely welcome a feast like Christmas. So it feels a little jarring today that the Church gives us a frightening picture of the end-time. Perhaps we are being asked to think like God does, outside of time and space. For God, the whole is known. So unlike us, limited by the experience of created time, God does not focus on a single event like a birth. God sees all in completion: God’s entry into our history, the work of Jesus in time and its continuation in us, and everything being brought to fruition. With his words, Jesus is not some reporter from the future describing events to come. He is using the images of his time to speak of the reality of human existence: our world and our history will have an end. And this end is also simultaneous with the coming of the Son of Man. When we raise our heads, then, and stand erect as the Gospel tells us, whom shall we see? We have heard elsewhere: it will be the face that mysteriously gazes at us from every human face: the upturned face of a child, the lonely face of elderly, the smiling face of a loved one, the hopeful face of the poor - all those around us to whom we have been good or guilty.

Prayer:
O Holy Mystery, we pray today through Jesus who shared our human condition as one who lived our life among us, just as it is, short and mysterious. He can be sympathetic to its fragility and unsolved puzzles. We thank you for this. But we know, too, that he lived life with courage and integrity and compassion. He has called us to follow the way he showed us. We find this hard. We pray for the courage to let grace flow through us. We pray for the integrity to accept the necessary loss of ego with all its self-promotion and clinging. We pray for an open heart and an ever-widening circle of compassion. We pray today through Jesus to become Jesus. We ask this in his name. Amen.

By Audrey Rogers
First Week of Advent
Monday, December 2, 2013

Scripture: Is 4: 2-6; Mt. 8: 5-11 See Readings

Advent is about expectation, faith and promise. In today’s first reading, the prophet Isaiah calls out that, one day, God’s glory will shelter and protect; one day, the fruit of the earth will be honor and splendor; one day, God will provide refuge and cover from storm and rain. The Israelites must have welcomed those images, clung to them. The Kingdom of Judah was at war, and their land was being invaded. The Israelites needed to hear that one day, Immanuel, God With Us, would come, and their faithfulness would bear fruit.

In today’s Gospel, the Roman centurion says the familiar words of faith that we repeat each Sunday before Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you under my roof, but only say the word…” Jesus’s healing demonstrates powerfully that there is a place at God’s table for all, that faith will unify us across labels that separate and divide.

Prayer:

Lord, grant us a spirit of watchful waiting and joyous faith. Help us to keep faith in difficult times. Show us those who need us to draw them nearer during this season. Prepare our hearts to welcome the Messiah.

Amen.

By Vanessa Johnson
First Week of Advent  
Tuesday, December 3, 2013  
Feast of St. Francis Xavier

**Scripture:** Is. 11: 1-10; Lk. 10: 21-24  
See Readings

*There shall be no fear on all my holy mountain for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea.*

This is the passage about the wolf lying with the lamb; babies playing with snakes; justice for the poor; and slaying the wicked by the “breath of his lips”—in short, the Reign of God, Old Testament style. And what is the source of this incredible outpouring of justice and mercy? Nothing less than the earth filled with knowledge of the Lord as that water fills the sea.

Isn’t this what we all seek—knowledge of the Lord as encompassing as the sea? To be embraced, enveloped, surrounded and enfolded by the knowledge of the Lord.

As long as I can remember, this has been the time of year I associate with being completely present in a particular moment, seeing without distraction, hearing without the background noise. I remember waiting in the stillness of church by candlelight at a Lessons and Carols, or waiting outside on a brisk night surrounded by only the stars and possibly a good camp fire.

This is Advent. We must stop, unplug, and remember the deep knowledge of the Lord. It is this knowledge that if shared by all humanity would unite sworn enemies, establish justice for the poor, and bring about the universal realization that we are beloved sisters and brothers of the same God. Picture this for a moment and stay with it.

**Prayer:**  
*Holy God, may we find and enfold ourselves within the deep knowledge of you. We will wait, watch, and listen for you and share the joy of waiting in faith with everyone around. Come Lord Jesus.*  
Amen.

By Matthew Hill
First Week of Advent  
Wednesday, December 4, 2013  
Feast of St. John Damascene

Scripture: Is. 25: 6-10a; Mt. 15: 29-37 See Readings

Today’s first reading is the same one that we used for my mother’s funeral in April, so I’ve thought a lot about it. The piece of it that resonated with me the most right after Mama’s death was the part about destroying death forever. It seemed to me, then, that the passage was completely metaphorical—it was using images of delectables to get us to imagine Heaven.

The pairing of this reading with the loaves and fishes miracle in the Gospel reading makes me think of something different now. The parable of the loaves and fishes is an affirmation that our physical needs are important; Jesus did not want to neglect them. So important that, according to Isaiah, they will continue after death and will be part of the celebration of Heaven.

In Advent these readings call attention to incarnation, the main subject of Christmas. Incarnation means that our bodies are totally compatible with our souls. Most of the time when I read about incarnation the emphasis is on how the unpleasant aspects of our physicality do not negate our spiritual nature—if they did, God couldn’t have been incarnate in Jesus.

That’s sort of negative. I mean, no one takes it as a compliment when they are informed that some aspect of themselves “is not disqualifying.”

I think the readings are saying that the fact that our souls are embodied is not just “not disqualifying” but is actively good—something to be ministered to (like Jesus did) and something that will be celebrated in Heaven.

Hear me, oh Lord, our God, ruler of the universe, God of Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel & Leah. There will be many, many times in the next few weeks when people will “….spread the table before me…”. Let me remember that Jesus and Isaiah thought this was good.

Prayer: Hear me Oh Lord our God, ruler of the universe, God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel and Leah. Help me to relax during this very tense time of year and celebrate whenever “….the table is spread before me.” Amen.

By Nan Astone
First Week of Advent
Thursday, December 5, 2013

**Scripture:** Is. 26: 1-6; Mt. 7: 21-27 [See Readings](#)

During Advent in 2000, my father passed away. It was a difficult time for my entire family, and the idea of preparing to celebrate a birth, even Jesus’s, while mourning my father seemed strange and impossible. And yet today’s readings let us know that it is OK to think of death and entering the Kingdom of Heaven during Advent. Many of our Advent and Christmas memories are of those we loved who have entered God’s kingdom. We are not asked to ignore those memories or put aside grief as we prepare for Christmas.

In today’s readings, Jesus tells us that “the one who does the will of my Father…[will]…enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 7). Jesus goes on to instruct us to do so by building our houses on rock, not sand. The image that comes to mind is the story I have read to my daughters many times: *The Three Little Pigs*. The wisest pig built her home of bricks so strong that they provided shelter from the Big Bad Wolf for her and her siblings. Perhaps that is exactly what we are asked to do in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven—build a life that is strong enough to withstand the big bad wolves of life greed, pride, and anger, just to name a few and then protect and nurture others in need.

This Advent as we pray and meditate on these readings, what can the story of Jesus’s birth tell us about how we should build our life brick by brick on the solid rock of God? Do we use bricks that are strong, yet humble, in remembrance of the Jesus’s humble beginnings? Do we use bricks that are welcoming, like Jesus’s family welcomes so many into the stable to take a peek at the baby in the manager? Do we use bricks that are joyful? First we must build our homes on a faith in God as solid as a rock, and then ponder what bricks we must add so our home is safe from the rains and winds of life.

**Prayer:** *Dear God, this Advent let us be grateful for the gifts of life and of death. This Advent let us be mindful of our desire to enter the Kingdom of Heaven when our time on Earth is finished. Let us be mindful of what foundation we use to build our lives and our homes, and help us to find ways to build our life upon God’s love.* **Amen.**

By Bethany Gregg
Today's readings provide two perspectives on Advent: the Old Testament view of Isaiah and the New Testament view of the blind men who have been healed by Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims God's promise of a time of healing, of completeness, of the reign of justice and of a world without shame.

The blind men, full of faith, approach Jesus and are healed through his touch. The blind men are so filled with joy that they are unable to contain themselves in spite of Jesus' stern warning, “See that no one knows about this.” They tell everyone they meet of Jesus' healing compassion.

As I reflect on today’s readings, I wonder: In what ways do I experience Advent like Isaiah, and in what ways do I experience Advent similarly to the blind men?

Like Isaiah, do I experience the world as incomplete, unjust, sinful and suffering? Am I hoping for a better future and a better world? Does my faith give me trust that such a future is possible?

Like the blind men, have I experienced the joy of Jesus' healing compassion in my life and the lives of others? Am I able to see the wonders of every day miracles? Does my faith give me trust that God's reign is already happening in the midst of my life?

Prayer:

Let me remember that I am always in God's presence.

*God, I thank you for this time of preparation. I thank you for the promises of Isaiah and the miracles of Jesus. Help me to trust that a better future is possible through faith in you. Help me to see the miracles that happen every day. Help me to be your instrument in fulfilling the promise of a just and compassionate world and to bring your comfort to those who are suffering and feeling hopeless.*  
*Amén.*

By Rich and Judy Ulrich
First Week of Advent
Saturday, December 7, 2013
Feast of St. Ambrose

Scripture: Is. 30: 19-26; Mt. 9: 35, 10: 1-8  See Readings

Today is the memorial of the 4th-century bishop, St. Ambrose. While he made important contributions to the church, he is also remembered for his great pastoral care. One story concerns his care of the weeping Monica whose adult son, Augustine, had lost his way. Reportedly, Ambrose said, “There is a time to talk to your children about God and a time to talk to God about your children.” Sometimes, it is time to pray.

Who among us had a perfect family or has one now? As Christmas approaches, when we are flooded with images of warm and happy families, our own circumstances may feel more poignant. How many of us worry about what might happen when the family gathers? More importantly, are there members missing entirely through alienation and bitterness?

We are called to have holy families. But a holy family is the fruit of each member being Spirit-attuned and God-filled, not the ground of their being. It is the product, not the starting point. God gave us what we need—freely—because God loves us faithfully, wildly, and unconditionally. We are bathed in the power of this love.

But while God’s love is unconditional, God’s forgiveness is not. It has one limit preached by Jesus and written in the Gospels. We affirm it in our praying as Jesus taught us: “forgive us as we forgive others.” This is a truly sobering, frightening offer. Every time we hold someone in unforgiveness, every time we nurture grudges, or tolerate alienation, we move ourselves farther from the healing power of God’s forgiveness.

It is not that God is bound by the prayer’s contractual language; it is a more profound spiritual reality. Unless we do the painful work of naming and healing biases, hurts, and betrayals, God cannot get in. Jesus tells us: “…drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.”

Maybe this is the way to welcome the birth of the God who is Love and aches to make us one.

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of peace. Amen.  

By Audrey Rogers
O Mary, conceived without sin,

From your very beginning nestled in God’s love
The eternal love that called you by name
From your forming in God’s mind
A mind of timeless existence

From your very beginning wrapped in your parents’ love
The family love that brought you forth
From your initial cell to your complex body
A body of mortal, historical time

From your very beginning you were immersed in God’s grace
The sanctifying grace that brings freedom, strength, light
From your boundless openness to God’s presence
A presence that knows no lack of goodness

From your very beginning you were full of grace
The living grace that permeates your total being
From your flesh, blood, and soul arises a holy dwelling place
A dwelling place that knows no evil

From your very beginning you were favored with God’s spirit
The spirit of pervasive grace unhindered by original sin
From your sinless life gifted to you in anticipation of Jesus your son
The son whose death and resurrection supplies saving grace for all humanity

From your very beginning you delighted in God’s spirit
The spirit of wisdom, understanding, fortitude, endurance
From your belief and trust in God you prepared the way of the Lord
The way of fullness of peace forever producing good fruit

Pray for us who have recourse to thee. Amen.

By Barbara Bowles
Second Week of Advent  
Monday, December 9, 2013  
Feast of the Immaculate Conception

**Scripture**: Gn. 3: 9-15, 20; Eph. 1: 3-6, 11-12; Lk. 1: 26-38  
See Readings

In the first reading, Eve exclaims, “The serpent tricked me, so I ate it.” Why is it easier to blame someone else for our failings? When do I rationalize that I am too busy to make that phone call or visit that friend? When do I say I support “that cause” but fail to take action? *This Advent is a time for thinking about my lack of faithfulness and what I choose to do about it.*

The Psalm and second reading tell us of the Lord’s justice, kindness and faithfulness to Israel and that in love God destined us for adoption through Jesus Christ. He chose us. God’s faithfulness is repetitive and unending. It is difficult to conceive an all-powerful God who is unwavering in loving us, despite our frailty and sometimes ugliness. When do I turn my back on someone who slighted me or criticized me? When do I turn my back on God and forget She is with me, wanting me to love that “unlovable” person I encountered yesterday. *This Advent is a time for thinking about my lack of faithfulness and what I choose to do about it.*

The Gospel tells of Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel, “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” It would be easy to say that we too would be steadfast in our faithfulness if we had been born without sin, like Mary. But thing of what a leap of faith that was for a frightened teenager. What has God asked me to do? Do I leave the heavy lifting to others? *This Advent is a time for thinking about my lack of faithfulness and what I choose to do about it.*

**Prayer**: *O faithful God, help me feel Your compassion when I want to act in anger. Help me speak with Your loving kindness when I respond to complaints. Help me listen for Your voice when I hear someone’s angry words. Help me see Your face when I look in the eyes of an unpleasant stranger. Help me hold the hand of one in need, with Your gentle touch. Help me to be faithful in receiving You with every breath I take.*  
Amen.

By Peggy Meyer
Second Week of Advent
Tuesday, December 10, 2013

Scripture: Is. 40: 1-11; Mt. 18: 12-14 See Readings

Two of today’s readings use the term “shepherd” to describe the character of God’s relationship with His children. Matthew 18 first describes the apostles’ questioning Jesus as to who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, but He answers that it is essential to be humble, like the little child for those who wish to enter heaven. Then the lesson follows regarding forgiveness, and the care God has for our spiritual welfare. Each of us is important to God, and He will not accept losing even one of us. God does not give up on us, even when we may have already done so, having gone astray so many times.

We seem to find it difficult to understand that we are already one with God and always have been. Most of us don’t conduct our lives as if we believe this. We operate as beings separate from God. We seek autonomy and what we imagine to be independence and self-sufficiency. This is essentially what going astray means, as we imagine that we really don’t need God, at least not at this particular time—maybe later.

As impossible as it is for us to believe, God still loves us, in spite of our faults, and will not let us go. What is it that we have we done to merit such fidelity and devotion? Nothing. We did not earn this kind of love. Our spiritual lives are not governed by human rules in spite of our assumptions and misconceptions about merit. God chooses to save us. This is a gift. But we must cooperate with, and not repeatedly walk away from, this invitation. We must continue to try to learn God’s will and adopt that perspective toward our lives and experiences, no matter how many times we falter. It is our Lord’s will that we return.

Prayer: Dear God, give me the awareness of my existence in you, so that everything I experience allows me to sense your hand in it.
Amen.

By John Rogers
Second Week of Advent  
Weds, December 11, 2013

**Scripture: Is. 40: 25-31; Mt. 11: 28-30** See Readings

The readings today tell us clearly that the Lord wishes to provide us with rest. Isaiah tells us it is for those who “hope in the Lord” that receive this renewing strength from God. Jesus tells us it is for those of us who come to him who are labored with heavy burdens, which will receive the lightness of God.

It is in this season of Advent that we tune our ears to hope, hope of the salvation of the world, which will make our world right. And yet we can look around and see that our country and world are saddled with the heavy burdens of: conflict in Syria, death and destruction from the typhoon in the Philippines, and the poverty and desperation we see in our own community of Baltimore. These could lead us to ask, where is the hope? What is there to hope for? Isaiah words are refreshing:

*Do you not know or have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.*

It might be a good exercise to call to mind those things that are burdensome to us, making us weary or sapping our strength. Do we trust in God enough to hand them over? Do we hope in what God can do for us, in us? We could ask ourselves: What does it mean to follow Christ? If we are feeling overwhelmingly burdened, maybe we need to look at how we are following.

In this season of anticipation and hope, we need to tune into those things that weigh us down and in faith and trust, hand them over to God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, may we slip into the yoke of your Son, a yoke not of oppression, but of liberation which is comprised of meekness and humility of heart. Help us to have the courage to follow Your son down Your path, so that we too might taste the sweet reward of the strength of Your refreshing care which lightens our burdens and enables us to soar on eagle’s wings. Amen.

By Christopher McCullough
Second Week of Advent  
Thurs, December 12, 2013  
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe  

**Scripture:** Zec. 2: 14-17; Lk. 1: 39-47  See Readings

*See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the LORD....Silence, all people, in the presence of the LORD, who stirs forth from his holy dwelling.* (Zec. 2:14,17)

Our Lady of Guadalupe is cherished by the people of Mexico, but she is also a rich symbol for all people of the Americas. She is the embodiment of the universal expectation of Our Lord coming to dwell among us.

Less than four decades after the Americans’ and Europeans’ first encounter (1531), Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego. Her image, imprinted on his cloak, is preserved in the Basilica in Mexico City. Her dark skin and hair, signifies her as a woman of the Americas. Her face calm and benevolent, she will know agony, but she communicates empathy. Also pregnant, she brings Christ to this continent, carrying "the Lord who stirs forth from his holy dwelling" (Zec. 2:17). Her image echoes Revelation’s vision of a woman *clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth* (12:1-2). The woman in Revelations represents the people of Israel whose faith brought a Messiah for the whole world, at great cost.

The readings celebrate the universality of the Christian faith. Elizabeth asks in Luke’s Gospel: *And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (1:42-43). Juan Diego asked this too. Parishes throughout the Americas perform a dialogue today translated directly from an early account of her appearance in the language she spoke to Juan Diego.

In these performances, a mother's kind words give hope to people. In this time of dissension over an increasing Latino presence in the U.S. we can take comfort from her message: "Do not fear. Am I, your mother, not here? Are you not under my shade and shadow? Am I not your happiness? Are you not on my lap and wrapped in my shawl? Is there anything more you need? Do not let anything worry you further or upset you."

**Prayer:** *Mary, Patron of the Americas, mother, sister, friend, pray for us.*

By Maureen Daly
Second Week of Advent
Friday, December 13, 2013
Feast of St. Lucy

Scripture: Is. 48: 17-19; Mt. 11: 16-19 See Readings

Often during Advent, we pray to come away from the hectic, fast-paced world of the commercial Christmas season, and to center ourselves. We ask for some contemplative moments. We ask for a chance to prepare in silence and peace.

It was during Advent that one of our babies required surgery. Nothing had prepared us for the intensity of the experience. We loved our little one with pure and whole love, stronger than anything we'd ever known. We met with a surgeon, who detailed a surgery we had never heard of. It seemed as dramatic and mysterious as space travel. Out of our depth, we sought a second opinion. This new doctor described a more complex, dramatic, and lengthy surgical option.

We took a few days to decide which surgery was right. During this time a friend said, "After this you should get a pass - You shouldn't even have to choose what you want for dinner." We made a decision, and once we did, we were very calm. We mailed Christmas cards, baked cookies and decorated the house. We lived out the familiar preparations, while we lived with something new.

Thank goodness, dramatic life decisions are not a nightly event, like dinner. Yet each day, I believe I am given chances to decide how to will live as a follower of Jesus, as one who is being saved. Decisions will come before me. I will not get a pass.

Prayer: God of patience, you who wait, and you who are with us now: Grant us a glimpse of your timeless nature. As we wait and prepare, let us rest in the truth of the incarnation. Let your Spirit fill us, as we give ourselves to music and dancing, to tears and morning, to austerity and discipline, and to celebration and merriment. Help us remember that you may be found in all of these facets of our lives. Amen.

By Colleen McCahill
Second Week of Advent  
Saturday, December 14, 2013  
Feast of St. John of the Cross

Scripture: Sir. 48: 1-4, 9-11; Mt. 17: 9a, 10-13 See Readings

John of the Cross is best known for being two things: mentor/confessor to St. Teresa of Avila and writer of a classic work of spirituality The Dark Night of the Soul. Based on a poem about a woman (the soul) going to meet her lover (God), the book expresses the experience of moving through purgation of the senses and spirit. In this experience, God rewards those who long for nothing but God with infused contemplation that brings joy.

The soul can lose comfort in works that may have been done for God: study becomes unproductive; meditation is comfortless; prayer feels useless. The soul may feel abandoned by God, as is reflected in Psalm 42, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” and Psalm 22 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”

A recurring image is of God as the nursing mother who must make the infant temporarily unhappy during weaning so that the babe can later experience the satisfaction of solid food. So it is, after a sometimes lengthy period of desolation, that God gives the soul an experience of God’s presence that is beyond words. It may be only for moments, but the joy is inexpressible.

Although John of the Cross is associated with the expression “dark night of the soul” clearly he did not originate it. However, it is a useful concept for all of us because most go through periods when we feel distant from God, when we wonder whether we are making a difference, when prayer seems pointless or unanswered. John urges us to move forward with trust in God, who has brought us through dark times before, and who will bring us through present darkness to unspeakable light and joy on the other side of desolation.

Prayer: Lord of darkness and of light, help us to struggle on when we are in the dark, in faith or in doubt, trusting You to bring us through to the Light on the other side. Amen.

By Peggy Shouse
Third Week of Advent
“Gaudete”

Sunday, December 15, 2013
Gaudete Sunday

Scripture: Is. 35: 1-6a, 10; Jas. 5: 7-10; Mt. 11: 2-11

See Readings

John the Baptist lived austerely in the desert, eating locusts and honey. Jesus lived among the people, sharing meals with tax collectors and fishermen. John’s God was a wrathful God who held out only two options: change of heart or unquenchable fire. Jesus’ God, his Abba, was a God of mercy and compassion.

The question posed to Jesus by John from prison was constructed in the same black-and-white framework as John’s mission: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus’ response, also framed a sense of his mission, was couched in the words of the prophet Isaiah that he had read in the synagogue at Nazareth.

But wait a minute, was it? The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear (Is. 35). On that day in the synagogue, Jesus took the scroll from the attendant and unrolled it to the passage that he wanted to use to announce his ministry. Why didn’t he stop at Isaiah 35? That would have prepared the people for much of what he would be doing among them. Why did he move along all the way to Isaiah 61, which contains the same spirit of hope? Jesus was looking for the passage that described the heart of his ministry and he didn’t reach it until the later chapter: “the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” The miracles—what you see Jesus doing—perhaps aren’t as crucial to his mission as his preaching—what you hear him say.

“Tell John what you hear and see.” Pay attention to me, Jesus says, and learn who your Father really is. Can I say the same thing? If the people around me—my family, friends, co-workers—pay attention to me, can they learn who God really is?

Prayer: God, Mother and Father of us all, help me to have a single hearted understanding of my mission in your kingdom. Help me to be aware of what I say and what I do, so that all my words and actions may mirror your goodness and compassion. Amen.

By Janice Bonner
Third Week of Advent  
Monday, December 16, 2013

**Scripture:** Nm. 24: 2-7, 15-17a; Mt. 21: 23-27  See Readings

As a rebellious teen, I loved the story in today’s Gospel. The chief priests and elders demand to know: “By what authority are you doing these things?”

Jesus says: *answer my question and I’ll answer yours.* And they were stumped.

My teen-self thought: *Ha! Take that, authority figures!*

I loved the story, but now I realize that I didn’t understand it, and I didn’t understand Jesus. Jesus wasn’t concerned with *putting people in their place*; he was focused on *helping people find their place.* In God’s realm, Jesus says, all of us belong.

The story (and Jesus’ response) may be intended to show that authority is not granted by humans, but by God.

“Where was John’s baptism from? Was it heavenly or of human origin?” could be intended to demonstrate Jesus as Messiah. John baptized Jesus, and said, “*Here is the One for whom we’ve waited.*” If John’s baptism was of God, then Jesus was/is truly the promised One.

I still like the story, but I see it differently. I still like Jesus’ response to the elders and chief priests, but now I don’t see a God scoring points in debate. I see a God whose response is always, *here I am, can’t you see? Come to Me.*

**Prayer:**

*Like the Psalmist in today’s reading, we say,* teach us your ways, Lord; guide us in Your truth.  
*Give us open hearts.*

**Amen.**

By Vanessa Johnson
Matthew’s Gospel today considers family connections. As he provides us with a genealogy for Jesus, his theological agenda notes that Jesus’ ancestors were Abraham and David. Four important women are listed in Jesus’ family tree: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary, Jesus’ mother. All are mothers of significant persons in Jesus’ lineage and Israel’s history.

This is also the feast day of St. Hildegard. She was an important mentor, visionary, advisor and confidant of popes, bishops and kings. Hildegard was a Benedictine abbess who lived in Germany in the 12th century.

In 2012, Pope Benedict named her a Doctor of the Church. As a scholar of scripture, music and nature, Hildegard understood and taught that people suffered from both physical and emotional maladies. She said our lives were not in harmony with nature and thus she used the gifts of nature, herbs and plants to practice healing arts. She reminded her contemporaries to honor all of creation, to respect it and learn from it. The best kind of a “tree hugger,” Hildegard taught that “the Spirit of God fills the earth,” and we are connected to the sacred earth. Ahead of her time, Hildegard practiced holistic ways of living. She knew physical and spiritual health and the earth are all connected.

Eight hundred years ago Hildegard was a political activist who condemned capital punishment. Heretics were often executed and Hildegard interceded reminding Christians that that even heretics were made in God’s image.

What a role model! A Benedictine, eco-theologian, writer of songs and music, a political activist and promoter of social justice, Hildegard was a descendent of an awesome genealogy. She too was Jesus’s relative, His sister, God’s daughter, like us, connected.

**Prayer:** For there is no creature without some kind of radiance—whether it be greenness, seeds, buds, or another kind of beauty. (Hildegard) May God help us to reflect radiance and beauty, to remember to Whom we are connected. Amen.

By Gerry Fialkowski
Joseph seems to be the oft forgotten, overlooked participant of the nativity. He seems to always be in the background, occasionally having a bit part, but even the lowly shepherds have more prominence. Yet, Joseph’s story is as remarkable as Mary’s. Both were visited by angels, but more importantly, both surrendered to the angel’s message and did as the angel of the Lord commanded. Imagine what the conversation was like when Mary told Joseph that an angel had appeared to her and now she was pregnant with God’s child. What an unbelievable story! He must have thought Mary was hallucinating.

I certainly think that his reaction would have been very similar to one heard in a long ago TV sitcom, “Mary, you got a lot of ‘splaining to do!!” But today’s Gospel tells us that at some point after hearing Mary’s news, and surely still struggling with his own disappointment and hurt, he decided he did not want to publicly shame Mary, but instead, to quietly divorce her, leaving her with her dignity. Maybe he had resolved that only by leaving Mary in this way would his conscience allow him to be free to move on from the situation. He could then seek another woman to be the mother of his children. His family and friends probably thought that he had lost his mind just as Mary had lost hers.

In all likelihood, they pressured and encouraged Joseph to take much harsher actions toward Mary. Joseph’s world was crumbling around him. Then in a dream, the angel appeared to him telling him not to be afraid (words the Angel Gabriel had used with Mary!) and instead to take Mary into his home and live with her as his wife. Remarkably, Joseph did so. Perhaps God chose Mary to be the mother of his Son knowing that she had a supportive, righteous and compassionate partner in Joseph.

**Prayer:** *O God, you have chosen us to follow you just as you chose Mary and Joseph. We welcome you into our lives. Help us to be your voice, your hands, and your heart on earth and show compassion to those we encounter.*  
*Amen.*

*By Valerie Rolandelli*
Third Week of Advent  
Thursday, December 19, 2013

**Scripture:** Jdgs. 13: 2-7, 24-25a; Lk. 1: 5-25 [See Readings]

Advent, the time of waiting, is served by this Gospel. In it Zechariah and Elizabeth await the birth of John who in turn will herald the coming of Jesus.

Two of the readings, in fact, describe older couples with no children who miraculously conceive sons at a time in their lives when that should have been impossible. John is born to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Samson is born to Manoah and his wife, who is not named. Both readings bring to mind the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah.

We can identify with the women in these readings. They felt ashamed because they had no children. The women didn’t meet expectations. Their status was lower than those who had children. This kind of suffering is familiar to modern readers. We tend to be too concerned with living up to the expectations of our peers. Our self-esteem is wrapped up in how we measure up. We get upset about “shortcomings” beyond our control like beauty, intelligence and athleticism. We try to become someone other than ourselves.

John’s life is a total contrast to this need for acceptance. His is the voice crying out in the wilderness. He is admired for going his own way regardless of society’s norms.

I want to be like John, but I am like the women who became mothers late in life. I look to others to measure how I am doing. I’m okay with that. I’m not going to have a sudden personality change this late in life. Still it is important to honestly assess whether I am “measuring up” to my own values. I don’t want to espouse Christian values while living materialist values. Either way I look to my peers for validation. I want to choose peers who share my values.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to look at myself honestly. Give me the strength to follow your values. Give me compassion for those who suffer because they fail to meet standards that aren’t worth meeting. Help me to see how I do the same thing myself. Amen.

By Jim Casey
Third Week of Advent  
Friday, December 20, 2013

**Scripture:**  Is. 7:10-14; Lk. 1: 26-38 [See Readings](#)

I have fond memories of the Advent seasons of my childhood…the purple candles and the pink one, which I often got to light. As I grew, I understood that Advent was a time to prepare for the birth of Jesus.

This Advent and Christmas season will be my first without my mom. Since she passed in April, I've often wondered what her life was like when she and my dad were newly married and then when she was expecting my brother. My mom had a strong faith and I suspect she was content and thankful as she awaited the arrival of her first child.

After being told by the angel Gabriel that she would bear the son of God, Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." What acceptance, strength and calm lie in that statement.

Yet how many of us would have accepted what the angel had to say? Our most likely reaction would probably have been doubt. Doubt that this was really an angel. Doubt about the truthfulness of the message. Doubt as to whether any of what was happening was real at all.

The Gospel doesn't say whether Mary had doubts, but I like to think she did. I like to think that she struggled with doubts when times were hard, but chose to believe that God had a message for her. I like to think that she chose to believe despite her doubts. That she chose to take a leap of faith in difficult circumstances, again and again.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we pray that we may learn from the example of Mary, that we may learn to listen for Your message to us, to recognize it when it comes, and to have the faith and trust to follow where You leads us. Amen.

By Jenny Saccenti
Third Week of Advent  
Saturday, December 21, 2013

**Scripture:**  Sg. 2: 8-14; Lk. 1: 39-45  See Readings

Fifty three Advents ago, my mother was pregnant with my sister Ann. This was to be the seventh baby girl for my mother, though there would be two baby boys to follow. I wonder, how it could be that my parents were just as happy to have another little girl come to them from God when their friends were clearly expressing disappointment? After all, my Dad was the third generation in a family business, a line of coppersmiths from Ireland. My parents always rejoiced, albeit in the serious way of the Irish. They had the baby baptized the first Sunday after she was born and purchased an insurance policy the next day because, God forbid, something happen and the child have to go into unconsecrated ground. Or worse, to Limbo, the mythical land populated by the poor souls of babies whose parents had not gotten them baptized before death overtook them.

I know that my heart leaps up within me when my wee grandchildren reach to me and say my name. I like to think that, like Mary, and like my parents, I would feel that same leap of joyful acceptance of the will of God. That’s not how it goes, however, especially when that will comes through at an inopportune moment, which seems to be the only time God ever takes the opportunity to call me to change my life and go in a different direction.

This is the season when I try to learn about joy and how to accept with joy the events that don’t quite meet my expectations. Just before my sister Ann was born, my grandmother died unexpectedly. She was very close to us; she lived right across the street so I saw her every day of my life. Her death was the first I remember of losing someone close to my heart. She was my father’s mother. One night after the funeral when he was tucking me in, I asked him why he didn’t cry for her. He never flinched. “I love her and I did everything I could to make her happy. Now she’s with someone who can do so much more for her.”

**Prayer:** Lord, let me learn joy. Let my heart practice joy. Open my heart to the sound of your voice so you can do more with me than I have done up till now with myself.  Amen.

By Nancy O’Neil
In the Gospel of Matthew, Saint Joseph is described as a righteous man who was unwilling to publicly denounce Mary, his betrothed, when he found out that she was with child. He decided to divorce her quietly. This is a great example of forbearance. Joseph decided to act more gently than custom allowed and withhold harsh judgment. His decision would protect Mary from shame and harm.

Perhaps God’s grace rains down in the openings made by forbearance, mercy and withholding judgment. Joseph had a dream in which an angel appeared and told him just exactly Who had conceived the child – the Holy Spirit. Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary into his home. His life opened up, and he became the earthly father of Jesus and the spouse of the Mother of God.

Paintings and statues depicting St. Joseph often show him holding a flowering staff or branch. The story of the flowering branch comes from the apocryphal (non-canonical) literature. In order to find a suitable spouse for Mary, priests instructed unmarried men of the House of David to bring branches to the temple and lay them on the altar. The branch brought to the temple by the 90 year old Joseph bloomed into flowers. With this sign, Joseph became the man chosen for Mary.

St. Joseph is the Protector of the Church, Patron Saint of Workers, of a Happy Death, and of the Interior Life. In the legend of the flowering branch, perhaps he is also the patron of blooming later in life.

**Prayer:** Dear St. Joseph, help us to be more like you and show mercy and forbearance to those we love. Help us to bloom. Help us to work in the spirit of thanksgiving and joy. Thank you for the example of safeguarding all that is holy. Amen.

By Rosemary Wallace
Fourth Week of Advent
Monday, December 23, 2013

Scripture: Mal. 3:1-4, 23-24; Lk. 1: 57-66 See Readings

Reading today’s Scripture passages I was struck by the words of Malachi referring to the coming of the Lord: “But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner’s fire…” At the end of Advent, with two days until December 25, “the day of his coming” is most literally Christmas. In this moment, when the Good News of God’s love for us is fully revealed in the birth of Christ, Malachi’s line of questioning is unsettling. How is the Incarnation a test to endure? How is the joy of the nativity like a refiner’s fire? In short, when it leads to a cross.

In the wonder of the nativity, God reveals His love for us, but also the path of our redemption. In that crib, God’s love for us is visible, but only in light of the suffering and death that flesh will know. Yet death on a cross is not the end. Through His cross, and the crosses of our lives, we follow a path to resurrection.

As Malachi foreshadows in today’s reading, when the Good News is revealed, it comes with a great test of endurance and the refinement of fire. When the Lord comes, he brings a love on fire, which burns off that which separates us from loving one another the way our God loves us. When the Good News is revealed, it is always cruciform, yet it leads to eternal life.

Prayer: Father, You revealed Your love for us in the flesh of Your son, Jesus. We rejoice at the promises of Christ made possible by His incarnation. Yet we know those promises come through the cross. Strengthen us, Father, that we may follow the path of your incarnate Son through all the crosses of our lives. Bless us with the graces to love one another the way You love us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

By Joe Hamilton
Fourth Week of Advent  
Tuesday, December 24, 2013  
Christmas Eve

**Scripture:** 2 Sm. 7: 1-16; Lk. 1: 67-79  
*See Readings*

_They looked up and saw a star,  
Shining in the East, beyond them far..._

Quick, name that tune! We all know this old Christmas carol’s words, but perhaps we cannot actually name it until we hit the refrain.

And this is how it is so often during the weeks before Christmas. The frenetic, demanding pace puts us on spiritual autopilot until the “big day”— mouthing the words but not singing from our hearts. Yet, Advent is a time for conscious reflection. And if you’re reading this booklet, you’re trying to stay focused on the “reason for the season,” but it’s not easy.

For me the song’s words “beyond them far” strike my overstimulated brain. For those shepherds of the song, it wasn’t just the actual star—but the light of Christ’s presence in the world—that was “beyond them far.” And this is how it can feel for us some 2,000 years later, particularly when the blazing, blinking holiday light displays dim our view of the stars.

But we know something that those “poor” shepherds didn’t know, namely that this is not the first Noel. Christmas comes every year. We know that Advent ends with the joy of Christmas. We know that the Resurrection brings us new life and hope. We know of Jesus’s real presence in our lives.

But we have to look up (or “looked up” for Christmas carol purists) to let that knowledge illuminate our lives. If we keep our eyes cast down, our noses on that holiday grindstone, we fail to see the brilliant light God has sent for us.

And that it what Advent is about—looking for God’s light. So on this last day of Advent, when things are the most chaotic, look up and see the star.

**Prayer:** _Heavenly Father, you sent the light of Your Son into the world. Help me to cut through the darkness of my life to dwell in that light every day, but especially today as my waiting comes to a close._  
_Amen._
Octave of Christmas
Christmas Day
Wednesday, December 25, 2013
Feast of the Incarnation

Scripture: Is. 52: 7-10; Heb. 1: 1-16; Jn. 1: 1-18 See Readings

I saw a great sight
It happened one night
There was a great light

Angels formed a ring
So they could sing
To the newly born king

During the day
He was laid on a bed of hay
To show us the way

This sight you see
Was made for you and me
So that we
Could learn to be
Believers in the unseen

I have learned to see
And love and be
With a full heart
Mind and head
To see and hear
Is good for the soul.

Amen.

By Maria Anne Brighoff
We read this passage from Acts today on December 26, a day outside of the scope of Advent, but within the Octave of Christmas. Yet I feel it is a wonderful Advent story about the “game change” in our relationship to God as it tells of the coming of Christ into the life of St. Stephen and the growth of a community of believers in Christ, the early Church.

The story of St. Stephen is one of those tales that you get exposed to early on as a young Catholic kid. His life and especially his death by stoning appeal to little boys who have an innate interest in gore. The picture of his twisted body battered by rocks again and again with his face turned upwards to God ensures that the story and image stick with you.

Let's briefly review the story of St. Stephen. One of the early believers that Jesus was the promised Messiah, Stephen was skilled in representing his faith. He was so effective in defending his faith that his adversaries fell upon him and, in the face of his continuing testimony, publicly killed him.

He stuck to his beliefs despite the obvious dangers. What about us, 21st-century readers/believers? There is little chance of our being stoned for our faith. It's not the image of St. Stephen, but his faithfulness—even in the face of disbelief and animosity—to following the message of Christ that holds meaning for us in the Advent season. It was his conviction that he needed to speak up for his faith and advocate for Christ's message of love for one another. “You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Mt. 10:19-20). There is always a cost attached to discipleship; it is up to us to search our lives and make the changes needed to respond to the gift of faith in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: We ask you, Lord, to help us resist the easy temptation to knock down rather than build up. We remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit is there to inform our thinking when we feel uncertain, challenged, or fearful of what others may think of us when we differ in our pursuit of the truth. Be with us throughout our Advent journey. Amen.

By Rowland Savage
Day 3 - Octave of Christmas
Fri, December 27, 2013
St. John the Apostle

Scripture: 1 Jn. 1: 1-4; Jn. 20: 1-8

See Readings

In the beginning
John accepts Jesus’ call
To journey with him
A fisher widely
Casts nets in teeming waters
Gathering, culling
A close disciple
Belovedly approaches
Believing, trusting
A young apostle
Zealously follows Jesus
Absorbing teachings
A son of thunder
Tirelessly proclaims good news
Fusing faith, hope, love
An eagle swiftly
Soars to highest heights to hunt
Snaring keen insights
An evangelist
Vividly depicts the Word
Growing visible
A visionary
Symbolically unfolds truths
Revealing the Christ
An elder gladly
Meditates on well-lived years
Rejoicing always
In our journeying
May light continue to dawn
A mighty beacon

By Barbara Bowles
Day 4 - Octave of Christmas
Sat, December 28, 2013
Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs

**Scripture:** 1 Jn. 1: 5 – 2:2; Mt. 2: 13-18 [See Readings](#)

*When Herod realized that he had been deceived . . . He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under.* Mt. 2:16

As we celebrate the coming of God to live among us, we can forget this incarnation did not mean joy, redemption and new life to all immediately.

It is appropriate to remember those who were the first to die for Jesus, the first martyrs in a sense. The Holy Innocents were slaughtered by Herod out of fear—fear of a rival king, foretold and expected by his fellow Jews, a king who might threaten his power and his favored status under Roman rule.

The suffering of parents deprived of their children in such a violent and senseless way and that of the children is hard to imagine. People of many faiths, in many times, have struggled with the concept of suffering, sometimes offering explanations, sometimes not. We as Christians wrestle with the idea of suffering and its causes, and we find no acceptable explanations as to why it exists. We find no answers that satisfy us.

How then do we live our lives? What do we do about suffering? Most of us are not quite satisfied to wait for the great final act of God that will rectify all wrong, as Revelations tell us, nor the trust of Julian of Norwich that “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well.” Maybe we can aspire to that sort of trust, but what do we do in the meantime?

Perhaps it is up to each of us to decide what we—individually and collectively—can do to alleviate suffering wherever we find it in the limited way we can. We can be present with those who are suffering, and we can pray—pray for those who are suffering, those who cause suffering, and ourselves, while we hope to eventually be able to trust all will be well.

**Prayer:** *Loving and merciful God, help us to see and to do what we can when we encounter suffering, knowing that you are also there with those suffering.* Amen.

By Peggy Shouse
Day 5 - Octave of Christmas  
Sun, December 29, 2013  
Feast of the Holy Family

**Scripture:** Sir. 3: 2-6, 12-14; Col. 3: 12-21; Mt. 2: 13-23 [See Readings](#)

Hmmm… how does the family I grew up in or the families I have become a part of over the years compare with the Holy Family? Is it fair to compare? Well, probably not … there is/was no sinless soul in the mix.

How do we interact with each other? Do we heed the words of Sirach to honor and support our fathers (and our mothers)? Do we live our lives with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience as Paul admonishes?

Were we fortunate enough to have good role models (parents and grandparents) to guide us? Have our lives become so cluttered that we’ve forgotten the lessons we may have learned ages ago?

We’ve just celebrated the birth of our Lord. His greatest gift to us is LOVE. We must realize that we all have limitations and these impair the unity of the family. We need to grasp our humanity and acknowledge that we may respond according to our own perspectives. We need to remember to LOVE our family members… to be open to them… to heal our hurts together.

How do we accomplish this? St. Francis of Assisi is attributed with the quote “preach the gospel, and if necessary use words.” Spending attentive time, paying attention to the needs of family members, exhibiting patience with an older or younger family member, these experiences help us show we care. These are gifts that (re)connect us with family.

The Holy Family is the ideal toward which we should strive…but it is a challenge! But small steps can move us forward to a more loving relationship with our families.

**Prayer:** Jesus, Mary & Joseph show me the way to truly love others. By your examples, may I be open to learn kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. May you help me learn to express my love for family.

Amen.

By Joan Fulton
Day 6 - Octave of Christmas  
Mon, December 30, 2013

**Scripture:** 1 Jn. 2: 12-17; Lk. 2: 36-40 [See Readings](#)

It is the next-to-last day of the year, the sixth day of the Octave of Christmas in this strangely quiet week that fits between the tumult of the secular world’s version of Christmas and the silliness of New Year’s Eve. The gospel appointed for this day tells the story of Anna, an elderly, pious widow who Luke says “never left the temple (and) worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.” Anna foretells of the coming of the messiah and spoke “to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna in her old age becomes a prophet and evangelist; the work of her life of prayer and fasting came to a climax with the birth of a child.

At eighty four, Anna would have been exceedingly old in a culture where women married in their teens and were most likely dead before 40. But as a widow with no children, Anna’s place in her society would be at its fringes, just like the shepherds called to the manger. But in the great economy of God, Anna has a significant role, and she reminds us that all, young and old, important and not important, are included at the banquet table of the new kingdom.

By December 30th, the year is very old and will expire in just one day. But this Monday, when many are not obliged to work or go to school, will not be the usual, hectic launching day of the week. Perhaps it might be a good day to imitate Anna and curtail our feasting of the last week before the whirlwind of food and drink of the New Year celebration. We empty ourselves gently and look back at the year with the perspective with which Anna looks at the world: a long journey with joys and sorrows but which contains the possibility of great surprise & wonder even in the deepening shadows of life.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us in remember that our older years can still hold possibilities of wonder and joy and new opportunities to further your kingdom. Help us to grow more loving, serve more willingly and speak your praise more loudly every day. To you be all praise and honor, O Lord our God, Jesus Christ. Amen.

By Graham Yearley
Day 7 - Octave of Christmas  
Tues, December 31, 2013  
New Year’s Eve

**Scripture:** 1 Jn. 2: 18-21; Jn. 1: 1-18 See Readings

*Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!*

_Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all you lands._

_Sing to the Lord; bless his name; announce his salvation, day after day._

Out with the old and in with the new! The psalm for today is just as happy, joyous, optimistic as most of us feel today! We feel refreshed and ready to start a new year! If you are like me, on this last day of the year, you have a list of resolutions, either in your mind or actually written down, things that you want to do differently or improvements you need to make. As with most years, mine includes: lose X pounds, exercise and eat healthier, spend more time with family, don’t complain as much. And of course I swear that this year will be different! My guess is that most of your lists look similar.

But actually our ‘new year’ started on December 1, 2013, the start of a new liturgical year. This Advent Season we spent preparing to “Welcome the Light.” As today’s Gospel says, _The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world._ We welcomed that Light, Jesus Christ, at Christmas. Perhaps, we should get in the habit of writing our resolutions at “Advent Eve.” Our lists might then include “Be more compassionate” or “Give X number of volunteer hours in ministries for the poor” or “Increase my financial contributions to St. V’s” or “Participate in a parish committee.”

Today’s Gospel is one of my favorite biblical chapters. Each weekend of the Christmas season, these passages will be read after the celebration of the Eucharist. Sit quietly as the Word becomes flesh and makes his dwelling among us. Happy New Year! Sing to the Lord a new song! Announce his salvation, day after day!

**Prayer:**  _Dear Lord, we thank you for all the blessings that you have given us through this past year. We especially thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. We pledge to you that in the coming year we will continually welcome your Light, increasingly become enlightened, and willingly share your Light with others. In Jesus name, Amen._

By Valerie Rolandelli
Day 8 - Octave of Christmas  
Weds, January 1, 2014  
Feast of Mary, Mother of God

**Scripture:** NM. 6: 22-27; Gal. 4: 4-7; Lk. 2: 16-21 [See Readings](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers/prayer-for-the-new-year.cfm)

Our lives are made of days and nights, of seasons and years, for we are part of a universe of suns and moons and planets. We mark ends and we make beginnings and, in all, we praise God for the grace & mercy that fill our days.

Let us praise the Lord of days and seasons and years, saying: Glory to God in the highest!

Remember us, O God; from age to age be our comforter. You have given us the wonder of time, blessings in days and nights, seasons and years. Bless your children at the turning of the year and fill the months ahead with the bright hope that is ours in the coming of Christ. You are our God, living and reigning, forever and ever.

**Prayer:**  
*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:*

*where there is hatred, let me sow love*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light;*

*where there is sadness, joy.*

*Good Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*

*Queen of Peace, pray for us!*
Acknowledgments

Cover image provided by Steve McDaniel.

Thanks to all those who contributed to this reflection booklet. Your contributions have enriched this Advent time of preparation.

May this booklet be a useful resource for spiritual preparation and prayer during this season of Advent and through the Octave of Christmas.