

WAITING FOR THE GOD

WHO . . .



ADVENT

REFLECTIONS 2014



FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 30, 2014

Scripture: Is 63: 16b-64:7; 1 Cor. 1: 3-9;

Mk. 13: 33-37

Wake Up! Watch! Be Free!

Perhaps the deepest pit is numbness – a general, low-grade anesthesia that settles in our habits, conversations, TV, reading, even prayer. We want badly to experience the God of old who rends the heavens, makes mountains quake, and does other awesome deeds. How many times have we, like Isaiah, bargained with God: Dear God, if you would just make the mountains quake or give me some other sign, then I'll get my act together? When nothing is rent or shaken, we return to just getting by.

These readings remind me of second century emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius who knew well this gnawing listlessness as well as the cure: "For why are you discontented? With the evil of men? Recall to mind that men and women exist for one another, that to endure is a part of justice, that people do wrong involuntarily. . . This remains: retire into your own terrain, do not distract or strain yourself, but be free, look at things like a man, a citizen, a mortal."

At the start of Advent Jesus practically yells the same thing: WAKE UP! Let go of your petty ego, self-pity, and discontent! Our God is here but not yet: Watch!

God will pierce the fog and reveal God's self, but we will miss the moment entirely if we do not drop the baggage, sit up, and watch. Isaiah too returns to this truth: that we must be like clay in the hands of the potter. Let us take a moment to free ourselves of the baggage that weighs us down and hardens our hearts, and to instead become again like receptive, unmolded clay: to wait, watch, and listen for the God who reveals.

Prayer:

Dear God, set us free that we may wait, watch, and listen for the God who reveals.

Amen.

By Matt Hill

First Week of Advent
Monday, December 1, 2014

Scripture: Is 2: 1-5; Mt. 8: 5-11

An Invitation

Let us go to the mountains
To talk with our God
To choose, to act, to learn

Over time
To beat
Our swords into plowshares
Our spears into pruning hooks

Let us go to the house of God
To join in unity with all people
To choose, to act, to ask

Over time
To pray
For each of us to prosper
For peace to be within our spirits

Let us go to Jesus
To appeal to him
To choose, to act, to touch

Over time
To heal
With words of authority
With confident belief

Let us go within our hearts
To choose, to act, to thank

Over time
To rejoice
In shining forth a new, warless creation
In shining forth God's light in our lives

By Barbara Bowles

First Week of Advent
Tuesday, December 2, 2014

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

Unable to choose a date for a reflection, I asked to have one assigned. The Spirit moved in a remarkable way. Isaiah is about the “peaceable kingdom,” natural enemies becoming friends. This is at the core of my career and personal motivation.

Edward Hicks, a Quaker preacher, painted over 120 versions of the “Peaceable Kingdom” between 1820 and his death. He draws on Isaiah and depicts God’s Kingdom as a gentle and hopeful world of natural enemies becoming friends; the leopard next to the lamb, the lion next to the buffalo, humans integrated with all of creation. I covet Hick’s works. I wish I could have one of his paintings in front of me every day.

Isaiah and Psalm 72 foreshadow the coming of Jesus, and the “wild and wonderful” promises of God’s Kingdom. Both suggest that Jesus would just make it all happen. He would establish “God’s Reign” and insure the inclusion of all God’s children with justice and mercy for all.

Yet, here we are 2000 years later, in a world, a Church, a nation that is increasingly polarized. I believe this is because Jesus challenged **US** to bring about the “peaceable kingdom;” gifted us with the wisdom to do so, and we have not embraced this wisdom of how to be in harmony with all of God’s creation on a personal or societal level.

My career has been a vocation of how to build bridges between the poor and the more advantaged, the religiously, politically and culturally divided. Yet, I haven’t a clue as to whether I contribute in any way to the peaceable kingdom. During this season of Advent I am challenging myself to know whether I can even find harmony on a personal level – with co-workers, family, neighbors or people with a different political viewpoint. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” We must embrace this at a personal and global level if God’s Kingdom is to come.

Prayer:

My prayer each day during Advent is drawn from Micah: *When truth and mercy embrace, justice and peace will kiss. Lord, help me to model that on a personal and global level.*

Amen.

By Geri Sicola

First Week of Advent
Wednesday, December 3, 2014
Feast of St. Francis Xavier

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

This set of readings includes some classics on God's enduring mercy and love. In a world filled with death and confusion, I have wondered about all the pain that God must feel for all that is happening that he/she did not intend. Yet in the end Isaiah prophesies that all tears will be wiped away and the banquet halls at the heavenly feast will be filled. The 23rd psalm reassures us in a similar way: I shall not want, I shall not fear because God is with me. The gospel reading gives a concrete example of how Jesus blessing of a few loaves and fish given by a child becomes enough to feed all.

Christ is the story of true bread come to the world to feed and fill us all. It is the story of God come in the form of a child, with all of the child's smallness/humility, dependency/openness to others and unfettered love. The child of Advent is a spiritual energy born within us, a means of renewal that the Holy Spirit invites us to experience and share with others this Holy Season. No matter what age we are whether a child who is already changing and renewing, mid years where we race to keep up with demands, or retirement where we let go of some of the demand, we are challenged to be new.

Prayer:

Dear Child Jesus: May we become one with your renewing spirit. May we see the world anew, closer to how you see and feel it. May we invite you to gaze upon us, in all our child-like frailty and hope. May your love burn deep within us, and by the calmness of still waters may we feel deeply your warmth and light this Holy Season.

Amen.

By Michael Susko

First Week of Advent
Thursday, December 4, 2014
Feast of St. John Damascene

Scripture: Is. 26: 1-6; Mt. 7: 21, 24-27

St. John Damascene wrote in his *Treatises on Divine Images*, “I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as [God] became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood.” Damascene was a vigorous and brilliant defender of the use of holy images who wrote in the mid-8th century, during the Iconoclastic period. It’s a blessing that we remember Damascene during the Christmas season, because it is precisely as a result of the entrance of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity *into our dimension as a flesh and blood historical human being* that we can “boldly depict the invisible God.” Holy images are signs of the Incarnation! They are also signs and reminders that our God loves us enough to allow God’s self to be relatable to and near us in tangible physical ways; through holy images, yes, but also through our neighbor, creation, art, and more. Look around you: every Face is a living, breathing icon pulsing with divinity.

In today’s Gospel, Matthew records Jesus explaining to his disciples that simply hearing the Gospel is not enough, but that whoever “hears these words and acts on them” is really enacting the Reign of God. Hearing and then doing.

Surely there’s a connection to Damascene’s defense of icons there. Let’s see: God *made flesh* as an historical person in Jesus. The divine *made flesh* in holy images. Christ *made flesh* in our neighbors. The Gospel *made flesh* by our actions.

Prayer:

Holy One, may our minds and hearts be opened a little more this year to the profound Mystery of the Incarnation. Help us to see more and more that everywhere we look there is You. You, the invisible God, are made flesh everywhere we look.

Amen.

By Lee Krempel

First Week of Advent
Friday, December 5, 2014

Scripture: Is. 29: 17-24; Mt. 9: 27-31

It's safe to assume from the first mention of Lebanon in today's scripture, that this country had not reached its full land potential. God promises "but a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard, and the orchard be regarded as a forest!" I'm imagining rows and rows of cedar trees and people walking around with baskets full of apples and lemons. That's the after, but I wonder what the before picture looked like. The enthusiasm that is delivered through God's words leads me to believe that future Lebanon is dramatically different from the then-Lebanon. Maybe Lebanon wasn't so bad, but God surely had higher expectations for it.

This passage holds promise for us too. It's likely that there is something in your life that you would like to be much different from what it is now. Perhaps you'd like to reconcile with a family member, get a better job, be healed from a health issue, overcome a chemical dependency, rise out of poverty, make some new friends, stop making costly home repairs...

This scripture promises miracles: "The deaf shall hear" and the "eyes of the blind shall see." You may not be expecting miracles, or maybe you are, but you can expect *something*.

Before He heals them in this reading's accompanying Gospel, Jesus asks the two blind men a simple question: "Do you believe that I can do this?"

I think that's a question worth asking oneself. Keep it as a reminder, even a mantra you repeat throughout the day. "Do I believe that God can do _____?" Hopefully you'll answer "yes" (that's kind of important) and your faith will help you shift your focus off of what things look like now to focus on God's power to change you and circumstances.

Prayer:

Dear God, during this season, I pray that we identify the places in our lives which could use a dramatic change. And I pray that during this "very little while" that we have faith and courage to hold on as we expect to arrive at a transformed place in our lives.

Amen.

By Jamyla Krempel

First Week of Advent
Saturday, December 6, 2014
Feast of St. Nicholas

Scripture: Is. 30: 19-21, 23-26; Mt. 9: 35-10: 1, 5a, 6-8

When I was little St. Nicolas would come to visit at our house on December 6th. We heard the Dutch accounts of his coming to the dock by boat then riding a white horse. He was dressed all in red as the Bishop that he was (of Myra, a province of Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey and Greece).

In Dutch, we knew him as “Sinterklaas,” yet from the other side family, we spoke French and he was “Saint Nicolas.” Celebrated as a great gift-giver in a number of Western, Central, and Eastern European countries, we heard about his gift with the three daughters of a poor widower: coming by at night and dropping in their window three bags of gold for their dowries. We sang little French songs to him so he would remember us, too, even if it was only with gold-foiled “money” chocolates or other small treats.

Happy Feast of St. Nicolas!

Prayer:

Dear All-Generous God, You gave St. Nicolas Your heart of compassion for others. This gift is reflected in the first Reading when Isaiah speaks of You as

*“Be[ing] gracious to [us] when [we] cry out,
as soon as [You] hear, [You] will answer us,” he tells us.
“[You] will give [us] the bread [we] need
and the water for which [we] thirst.”*

Help us to be equally giving in our interactions with each other and, especially, with You as we prepare for Your coming into our hearts this season of Advent. So be it.

Amen.

By Louise Gregg



SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 7, 2014

Feast of St. Ambrose

Scripture: Is. 40: 1-5, 9-11; 2 Pt. 3: 8-14; Mk. 1: 1-8

For me personally it is so exciting to have Pope Francis at the helm of the church. How affirming to have a leader committed to *listening* to ordinary people: -A man who kisses the feet of the unloved -A role model who exhorts compassion and denounces privilege. In short – we have a pope who models the life of Jesus – shepherd, teacher, friend, healer.

I was surprised to learn that Pope Francis was not always the man we see today. According to Newsweek (Oct 23, 2014) he was conservative and autocratic and “so divisive were his 15 years as Jesuit kingpin in Argentina that, when it ended in 1986, he was sent into exile by Jesuit leaders in Rome.” The story goes on to say that after his exile – a time marked by daily prayer and discernment– he emerged a transformed man with a new compassion for the poor. This is the man we see today.

St. Ambrose, much celebrated as generous and brave by Italians also does not appear to have walked a straight path to sainthood. There were all kinds of brutal politics and allegiances in his day and standing up for one cause could mean death and suffering to those on the other side. Hardly the example Jesus gave us.

Yet both men whose lives were anchored by daily prayer – found forgiveness and healing that allowed them to be transformed. Their transformations can inspire and guide us in our own journeys.

Thank you, thank you for the tremendous power of your healing when we seek and find God.

In the words of St. Ambrose of Milan, Bishop, Writer, Doctor –

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me when I seek you. For I cannot seek you unless you first teach me, nor find you unless you first reveal yourself to me. Let me seek you in longing and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding.

Amen.

By Madeleine Shea-McKnight

Second Week of Advent
Monday, December 8, 2014
Feast of the Immaculate Conception

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

Today's feast is, one of the most humbling Holy Days for me in our faith tradition. Humbling because of the immeasurable esteem Mary has with God, but also humbling because until recently I was celebrating the wrong thing. I just figured we were honoring Jesus' conception in Mary's womb - an Immaculate Conception in its own right. But by the grace of God, I finally considered the math and now am in lockstep with the rest of the 1.2 billion global Catholics who are celebrating the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the womb of her own mother, Saint Anne!

In my defense, Luke's Gospel read for this Mass recounts the words of the Angel Gabriel to Mary: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus." However, the spirit of this Holy Day is rooted in Gabriel's salutation to Mary: "Hail, *full of grace!* The Lord is with you." Not partially. Not 99.9%. Mary was completely filled with God's grace at overflowing levels and devoid of sin since the very moment she was conceived by her earthly parents, Anne and Joachim. Hence we honor God's plan for Mary and her maximum levels of God's grace during today's Feast.

While I'm not qualified to reflect on the technical details of God's graces, they are something I know we all need in abundance to navigate the complexities of life in a way that reflect God's will for us. My simple appreciation for grace also recognizes that it's a two-way street: God's perpetual generosity in offering graces and our openness to abide in those graces with thankful hearts.

Please join me and other Catholics at Mass on this day to celebrate Mary's distinction among us. Together we can pray with her for a new awareness of God's graces in our own lives.

Prayer:

Dear Mary, Mother of God, we thank you for modeling what it means to accept God's grace. Help us to recognize God's endless mercy and loving supply of graces afforded to each of us. Make our hearts and minds one with Jesus' so that we joyfully accept God's graces and share them with others.

Amen.

By Fred Jorgensen

Second Week of Advent
Tuesday, December 9, 2014
Feast of St. Juan Diego

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

“Prepare the way for the Lord!”

As tradition would have us believe, Juan Diego a modest, Native American convert to Christianity, was so fervent in his devotion to his new faith that he walked fifteen miles every day in order to attend Mass at the Franciscan mission. Nurtured by his devotion to the Eucharist, Juan Diego cooperated with God in preparing himself to become a conduit through which the Lord could reach out to others. How does the Lord ask that I prepare myself to receive him?

“Build a highway for our God!”

Juan Diego’s path led him to a hill where Our Lady spoke to him; it led him to his skeptical bishop, whom Our Lady convinced, through Juan Diego, to build a church for his people. Where is God inviting me to build him a path? To whom does it lead?

“Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together.”

Our Lady asks Juan Diego, “Am I not here, I who am your mother?” Mary adopts this humble man of faith, embracing a new people and inviting them into communion with her son. The image she leaves with him is of a copper-skinned Madonna, a symbol of Christianity’s inculturation into the New World. How am I being invited to open my mind about how the faith might be transforming itself to operate in my world?

Prayer:

Dear God, grant me the faith of Juan Diego. Help me to build a road to your people. Allow me to bring your Word to them so that you can embrace them as they are, and let me see the beauty of the gospel as it is expressed in every culture.

Amen.

By Mike Jacko

Second Week of Advent
Weds, December 10, 2014

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

Today's readings tell us about God's love and care for us and the need for us to place our confidence in Him. In the first reading, Isaiah writes "They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint." In the psalm response, we hear "Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness". Advent centers our hope upon the birth of Jesus and promises us abundant blessings if only we trust in the LORD.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to the crowds: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." All of us have heard that Gospel message many times and have sought the rest and peace that Jesus offers. It's a wonderful Advent message of expectation. We await the birth of Jesus who will lighten our burden.

At the same time, however, Jesus asks us to take up His yoke and learn from Him. Is this also an Advent message? I think so. Jesus is inviting us to share and even carry the burdens of those around us especially those who have few, if any, hopeful expectations.

Christ's words have an extra special meaning for me during Advent. It was during Advent two years ago that my wife Vicki passed away. Christ's words remind me that he has lifted my burden by wrapping me in an unending embrace of love, kindness and comfort that has given me rest – a gift given to me by the loving faith community of St. Vincent's to whom I will be forever grateful.

Prayer:

Lord, help me never to doubt and to trust in You always. Be merciful and kind to me and lift my burdens. Remind me always to be merciful and kind to all those I meet and to help you lift their burdens and bring them hopeful expectations.

Amen.

By Jack Schmidt

Second Week of Advent
Thurs, December 11, 2014

Scripture: Is. 41: 13-20; Mt. 11: 11-15

In today's gospel Jesus speaks again of the Kingdom of Heaven. Here he describes John's status in the kingdom, and later refers to the suffering it has endured since John, who is its harbinger ("Elijah"; *Mal* 4.5-6). What does this "kingdom" mean, and what does that imply for us in the 21st C?

In Matthew 13, Jesus uses parables to describe some characteristics of this kingdom: the sower who throws out seeds which are ultimately accepted or rejected; the potential that members will be mixed in with weeds; like a net cast out to capture as many "fish," i.e. followers as possible, including those who choose not to follow and will be separated later; the incredible power of the tiny mustard seed; the transforming effect of yeast; the preciousness of a pearl or great treasure.

The Kingdom's arrival signals that God's Presence in us is now made more visible, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see. Today's Isaiah and the Psalms allow us examples of God's unique qualities: *reassuring* ("fear not"); *compassionate, kind, merciful, slow to anger* and *faithful*. Such a Being has not and will not abandon us. Recognition of this Kingdom requires a new paradigm of our relationship to God. Not the vertical one with God up there, keeping track of our behavior down here, and after repeated episodes of misbehavior, cracking down in retribution. In this Kingdom, God is One with us, who were made in God's Image and Likeness. By the way, this has always been true since the dawn of our existence, but God has apparently concluded that we need more assistance in grasping the obvious. We must recognize and acknowledge this Kingdom if we are to be transformed into what we were intended for – fully human, alive persons. If we fully embrace the Kingdom, our perception of our neighbor will change, as will how we conduct ourselves in relationships, since we are one with them as well.

Prayer:

Good morning, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thank You for the gift of my life today. Please give me the strength of vision and hearing to sense You in those whom I meet and to respond as You might. In the Name of the Father Who created me, the Son Who redeemed me, and the Holy Spirit, Who renews and sustains me.

Amen.

By John Rogers

Second Week of Advent
Friday, December 12, 2014
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Scripture: Zec. 2: 14-17; Lk. 1: 26-38

What better story during Advent than that of Our Lady of Guadalupe? She represents universal hope and compassion. The Mother of the new church in the Americas brought light in the midst of darkness. In Revelation 12:1 “*when it was night, a great sign appeared in this part of the world: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet, on her head a crown of twelve stars.*” Mary was poor and lived in an occupied land. She changed the world by bringing us the son of God and did the same for the conquered people of the Americas choosing a poor, humble man Juan Diego to be God’s messenger so the Basilica of Guadalupe could be built to unify ALL people.

And with hope we find great joy in Zechariah 2:14-15, “*Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the LORD. Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day.*” This hope and joy spread then as it did in the Americas by Our Lady of Guadalupe and in Luke 1:37-39, *Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the LORD; my spirit rejoices in GOD my savior”*... So on this day we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, reminded of the coming birth of her son and our savior, Jesus... *the light of the world.*

During Advent in 1985 my father had a severe heart attack, went into a coma and was very close to death. After 4 days he came out of the coma, recovered and was able to celebrate Christmas with us at home. This Advent that seemed to have little to celebrate turned into one of our family’s most joyful. Through everyone’s prayer, *light came out of darkness* through faith in God.

Prayer:

Oh God please guide our church, embracing all of the teachings of your son. Let us become a unified community who embodies love and the principles of acceptance and tolerance. Please keep us on this path now and forever.

Amen.

By Alana Florio

Second Week of Advent
Saturday, December 13, 2014
Feast of St. Lucy

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

Today's readings are focused on the prophet Elijah—with the Old Testament reading describing the ascension of Elijah in a fiery chariot and Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew saying that the coming of Elijah (a sign of the final times) has already happened in the person of John the Baptist . . . and they missed it. Elijah has already come, but was not recognized.

Later in Matthew's gospel, we see Jesus address the question of recognition once again. Jesus answers the questions, "when did we see you" (hungry, thirsty, unclothed) by telling the disciples that He was in the face of the least of their brothers and sisters. The disciples missed once again. Let's not have to face that accusation by failing to recognize the face of God in the people around us.

In my career as a non-profit fundraiser, I approached many people to make sizeable donations to truly worthy causes. If only I had read the story of St. Lucy, early 4th century Virgin and Martyr, I would have had an amazing story to tell. St. Lucy had consecrated her life and virginity to her Christian faith, and, since she did not plan to marry, asked her mother to allow her to distribute her dowry to the poor, along with a sizeable portion of her mother's riches. Her mother was not impressed with her daughter's generous impulse; she countered with the option of making a bequest, a gift to be made after the mother's death. Lucy told her mother that she would only be doing this because her parent couldn't take the money with her. Mom was hedging her bets in the 4th Century!

As we come to the halfway point in Advent, think about how we are hedging our bets for the future. Saving our riches for some future need is not limited to our finances – rather, generously sharing ourselves at all times is the message of Jesus. Writing a check is sometimes so much easier than truly looking into the eyes of our brothers and sisters and seeing the need inside. We are called to make a loving connection to the needy, and aren't we all needy?

Prayer:

Lord, I know you are near. You reveal yourself in the faces of those I meet. Help me not miss You but to recognize You by generously sharing myself with those in need – my family, friends and the people I encounter in everyday life.

Amen.

By Peggy Cronyn



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 14, 2014

Gaudete Sunday

Scripture: Is. 61: 1--11; 1 Thes. 5: 16-24; Jn. 1:
6-8, 19-28

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me.

My soul was in chaos. I was grieving the deaths of my brother and a dear friend. My faltering faith could not sustain me for I no longer trusted what I had learned in my 12 years of Catholic education.

I drove to Iowa to visit a dear friend, a Franciscan sister. Although I had planned nothing more than a pleasant visit with Janet, I found myself questioning her and seeking answers about God, death, and eternal life. She responded patiently and thoughtfully and when I returned home we continued our conversation by email and Skype. I soon began to believe again- to have faith.

Janet guided my reading. Initially, I devoured everything Joan Chittister had written. Then John O' Donahue told me about my soul and Thomas Merton talked to me about God.

That summer, I was led to St. Vincent's. One of the first liturgies I attended was during the Eucharistic series in the summer of 2013. "Be Still and Know That I AM GOD." That phrase continues to inspire me, to calm me when I'm afraid, to soothe me when I'm in pain, to relax me when I'm stressed. I have a bronze engraving of it that reminds me throughout each day of my joy in finding God again and in realizing that "the spirit of the Lord God" had come upon me!

Janet and I speak often of that day when she took my hand and agreed to accompany me on my spiritual journey. It is clear to us both that the Holy Spirit led me to her and then to St. Vincent's.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for inspiring me – and giving me the courage and humility I needed- to reach out when I was in pain. Now, during this Advent season, I pray for further inspiration to lead me to a continuing awareness of your voice in my heart and your will in my mind. Let your spark within me grow brighter every day as I seek to live my life to honor you.

Amen.

By Mary Laukitis

Third Week of Advent

Monday, December 15, 2014

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

In doing some Ignatian praying with the scripture, I find myself relating with the chief priests far more than I'd like to. I think I have a pretty good idea of who Jesus is, or at least acknowledge that I believe he is/was the Son of God. I can point to various times in my life where I believe there was some Divine Intervention that has helped fortify my faith. Yet, like the chief priests who saw Jesus working miracles and being divine, I see this and focus on how uncomfortable it makes me because it challenges me.

Like the chief priests, when confronted with the question of whether or not John the Baptist's baptism and ministry (and by extension Jesus since he was baptized by John) was of heavenly or human origin, I'll take the cop out that I do not know. Admitting that Jesus is of heavenly origin and truly committing to all that implies means changing a whole lot of how I look at other people, societal institutions and my own humble place in creation. It's just easier for me to say I'm into Jesus but am generally not so sure on the divinity thing, so I can take what I'm comfortable with and leave the rest of what he said and did for someone else to grapple with if they so choose. It would be much more convenient for me to say that they can humble themselves to follow the difficult example Jesus set, but I'm going to admire him from a distance and continue through life without submitting myself to all of Jesus' teachings as best I can.

As it is, there's the issue I raised earlier that I have times in my life that I think on some level Jesus has played a role in my life. If that's the case, I owe it to him to follow him as if he were God incarnate, and I cannot coast through life pretending Jesus did not call me to live a tough life of self-sacrifice.

In the first reading, Balaam says "I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near." This is more or less where I am at this Advent season. I have beheld Jesus at times, but still kept him at a safe distance so as to not influence my comfortable day to day life. Jesus is always calling us to give up ourselves and our notions of how best to live life and to follow him more nearly. So I am both waiting for a time when Jesus can be more fully in my life, but working towards that as well by trying to acknowledge where I keep Jesus out of my life because of the discomfort he would cause.

Prayer:

Show us, LORD, your love, and grant us your salvation.

Amen.

By Kieran Ruppert

Third Week of Advent
Tuesday, December 16, 2014

Scripture: Zep. 3: 1-2, 9-13; Mt. 21: 28-32

Today's Gospel is fertile ground for thinking about our relationship with God. The parable in this gospel references a common experience. Two sons are asked to work. One agrees, but doesn't follow through. The other refuses to work, but comes through in the end and works without telling his father. Parents know common variations. Your child listens intently but blithely ignores your advice. Or, your child doesn't seem to hear a word you say. Weeks later you learn, and not from her, that she took your advice after all.

Which of the two did what was asked?

This parable sounds as if the second son earned God's love and the first did not. I know better. The parable doesn't ask which son is loved better. Both sons are loved. The parable asks which son pleases the father more. It's an old problem of mine, and I suspect most people have the same problem. We assume the child who pleases most is the child who is loved best. Even after years of sermons and prayers, on some level I still believe love is earned.

Certainly I've played the role of both sons in my life. There have been times when I've made a promise and failed to keep it - sometimes despite my best intentions, other times out of selfishness. There are other times when I have said "no" when I should have said "yes." And some of those times I did what was asked after saying "no."

What meaning should we take from the parable? We need to be tolerant of people of other faiths, or of no faith at all. We must not be pious but insincere. For me, it also means that acting as God would act is the most important duty.

Prayer:

Lord, as I prepare for your coming, I pray about the mystery of your love. Thank you for your love. It is a generous gift, neither earned nor deserved. Help me to follow your will, not because I must, not because I fear losing your love, But because I want to imitate you. In this time of reflection, help me to be humble. Remind me that all I have is through your grace.

Amen.

By Jim Casey

Third Week of Advent
Weds, December 17, 2014
Feast of St. Hildegard of Bingen

Scripture: Gn. 49: 2, 8-10; Mt. 1: 1-17

Today's Gospel presents the genealogy of Jesus, noting 42 generations that came before him and highlighting his **connections** to Abraham and David. This passage clearly indicates the importance of families and "roots" in the lives of our early ancestors. In the Old Testament passage Jacob gathers his sons for a blessing and warns them to **listen** to him. In this gathering he specifically praises one of his sons, Judah, and predicts that the scepter would not depart from Judah. As we look at the genealogy line up, it is clear that Jesus, the Messiah, is a descendent of Judah.

When choosing a day for this reflection, I was immediately drawn to this day. The recitation of the genealogy fascinates me. Why is this recitation of 42 generations repeated year after year? What is it about "roots" that is so important? I do know that my roots are important to me. Although I have little time now, when I get to the point of retirement, genealogy will become a past time for me. I want to know and understand who the people were before me and how they have shaped who I am. This must have been true for Jacob and his sons as well, so much so that at the end of Chapter 49 in Genesis, Jacob indicates his desire to be buried with Abraham in Canaan.

The second reason I chose this day is because it is the feast day of St Hildegard of Bingen. St Hildegard was a mediaeval saint who lived in Germany in the 12th century. She was a philosopher, a healer, and a scholar. In 2012, she was named a Doctor of the Church. She was also a visionary, hearing the voice of God and reflecting that voice in her songs and her books. Just as Jacob emphasized the importance of listening, Hildegard listened and saw. She saw visions as a child. She grew in her knowledge of God, and with a deeper understanding of her roots she acted and promoted justice.

Prayer:

"Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love; come to teach us the path of knowledge!" Come to teach us how to emulate those who have gone before us. Come to teach us how to advocate for a more just world.

Amen.

By Joan Kub

Third Week of Advent
Thursday, December 18, 2014

Scripture: Jer. 23: 5-8; Mt. 1: 18-25

Justice shall flourish in his time and fullness of peace forever.

Justice, it is an interesting concept. It is used both secularly and religiously. We have a justice “system,” but certainly, God’s justice “system” is different than ours. Jeremiah proclaims the raising of a *righteous shoot* to reign and govern wisely. This is the backdrop for the Gospel reading which I cannot help but hear with the recent synod on the family ringing in my ear.

Here we have the story of an “irregular marriage.” Joseph is contemplating leaving Mary because he finds she is with child – a child not fathered by him, much less before their union is completed. But in a dream Joseph is encouraged to carry on and take Mary as his wife.

Imagine Joseph in this story, a good and faithful Jewish man who is asked to do something different than what he understood his faith would ask of him. The thought rolling through my mind is what did Joseph have to overcome within himself to follow this invitation? This transition seems effortless in the Gospel, but yet Joseph was contemplating divorcing her quietly, so what got him over the hump? Well this dream of course, but I still wonder about his humanness and his ability to jump right in with the plan.

What we have in this story is a story of God’s justice. Human justice called for divorce at least or stoning at worst. God’s justice called for the unlikely plan of the righteous shoot being brought out of an unrighteous situation by Jewish standards of justice. Even at his conception Christ is turning the world on its head. We hear this echoed in Mary’s Magnificat. So as we await the coming of the Savior, we can ask ourselves; What is it that we need to overcome within ourselves to partner with God’s justice and peace?

Prayer:

Dear God, I pray that your justice will flourish and bring the fullness of peace. As we await Christmas, help me to focus on the coming of your Son who is Emmanuel, – the fullness of your peace in our time. May I feed on the peace he brings to us in his birth. May it give me strength to help establish God’s irregular, merciful justice in the world.

Amen.

By Chris McCullough

Third Week of Advent
Friday, December 19, 2014

Scripture: Jgs. 13:2-7, 24-25a; Lk. 1: 5-25

Today's readings teach us about two women, both of advanced maternal age, chosen by God to bear sons. Menoah becomes the mother of Sampson, who grows into a man of superhuman strength and bravely defends his people. Elizabeth becomes the mother of John, who grows into a man of enormous faith and prepares the way for Jesus. The sons they raise become mighty voices for God. But their might emanates from their undaunted mothers.

It takes an enormous amount of courage to bring a child into this world. We are bombarded by news of horrific events, tragedies, and crimes. What if those tragedies befall our children? Yet day after day, year after year, and century after century we choose to ignore all the threats. We take a leap of faith and blindly place our trust into something more powerful, more loving and more brilliant than we can possibly comprehend. The circumstances of the conception are irrelevant. Old and barren like Menoah and Elizabeth, young and unmarried like Mary, whether by nature or science, we make an audacious choice to have a child. Why? Life can be so difficult, so complicated, so heartbreaking. Why would anyone in their right mind take on the responsibility, the time, the effort, the heartache, and even the expense of parenthood? It's completely illogical. It's utterly irrational. But the urge to have a child is all but impossible to ignore. It is an instinct so deep and powerful within us that it emboldens us, arms us with the confidence needed to become a parent. And how sweet it is when that child is born.

Giving birth to a child is one of those rare glimpses into the eternal presence of God. When we hold a newborn child it is like feeling God's breath on our cheeks. The love we have for that child is like no other love we've ever felt. This love is instantaneous, it is immense and it is fierce. This is God's love. How else could we take such a magnificent leap of faith?

Prayer:

Lord, our God, you are our Mother and our Father. As the day of your son's birth draws near, we are reminded of the immeasurable love you have for your children. Help us to expand our faith and love for you and each other. Give us the fortitude to be loving guides for our children and to always be examples of your love.

Amen.

By Barbara Murphy

Third Week of Advent
Saturday, December 20, 2014

Scripture: Is. 7:10-14; Lk. 26-38

The first reading from Isaiah reminds me of the powerfulness of God. He asks Ahaz to pray for a sign. He explains that no sign would be too difficult. As a child, Ahaz may have jumped at this idea and began spouting out the ways he would like God to make himself known to him. But, as an adult, Ahaz's initial reaction is fear and doubt. He questions if making such a request would be testing the Lord.

The Christmas traditions with which I was raised, remind me of the story of Ahaz. As a child, I did not hesitate to ask Santa or Jesus for exactly what I wanted. I did not fear that Santa could not handle it. Likewise, I could not imagine that Jesus would not answer my prayers. However, like Ahaz, as an adult I doubt and question the power of God and my relationship with Jesus. Through life experiences I have learned to feel skeptical about people's promises, guilt for making requests, and doubts about gifts of grace.

For me, these readings are a reminder that God's love is not human. It is not of this world. God has the power to create the Immaculate Conception. Christmas time reminds me that I need to unlearn the fears and doubts I project onto God and embrace the magic of his love. It is with earnestness this season that I seek to view my faith through the eyes of my five year old self.

Prayer:

Dear God, I ask that you grant us the gift of courage, acceptance and faith this season. You offer us miraculous gifts each day. I pray that we have the courage to hear your voice amidst the noise that distracts us. I pray that we accept your gracious gift and chose to unlearn the things that may hinder us from accepting them. Finally, I pray that we have the faith of Mary the Virgin Mother, who chose to walk with you even though she did not know what her future would hold.

Amen.

By Tracy Sanna



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Sunday, December 21, 2014

Scripture: 2 Sm. 7: 1–16; Rom 16: 25–27;
Lk. 1: 26-38

God is the One Who amazes. Today's Gospel is Luke's telling of the Annunciation, a feast day in its own right that we celebrate on March 25. The angel Gabriel is sent by God to announce to Mary that she has found favor and will be the mother of the savior to which Mary replies 'Let it be done.' The entire story has been so amazing that it became a favorite scene for the Renaissance artists. Go to any period museum and it seems the winged archangel and the richly robed maid in prayer surrounded by chubby cherubs can be found on every other wall.

But to understand this important event and why we celebrate it in its own right, we need to erase all these images from our mind. They make the salvation story too small. In Mary, God has offered humanity an icon, something to contemplate and break through to a more amazing truth. The Gospel tells us that in Mary's womb the human Jesus took form. But when we embrace this Mary-event as an icon we come to see, in Ilia Delio's words, "...the universe as a cosmic womb wherein God is seeking to come to birth through suffering, death, and new life" because Delio adds, "...being desires more being and love seeks more love."

This is a different mindset from what we have heard that the whole of creation came forth from God intact and would return to God. This icon paints a different picture indeed: the universe is becoming, groaning in birth pains as Paul writes in his letter to the Romans. And here is the ultimate amazement God offers: as the whole Annunciation event turned on Mary's assent, so too does God's birth in the universe require the assent of all the creatures: 'Let it be done.'

Prayer:

Holy Mary, teach us how to be pregnant with Life, how to carry the Light of the World, and how to wait in graced darkness for the Holy Mystery to unfold. Let it be done.

Amen.

By Audrey Rogers

Fourth Week of Advent
Monday, December 22, 2014

Scripture: 1 Sm. 1: 24 - 28; Lk. 1: 46 - 56

Waiting is hard. Sarah had been promised a child, but was aging rapidly and waiting apparently in vain.

Hannah longed for a child of her own through long years of watching her husband's other wife bear child after child.

Elisabeth was advanced in years and childless, waiting in hope of a child.

As I was reading the stories of Hannah and of Mary waiting for this unusual birth, I couldn't help but remember my own waiting. I had wanted a baby of my own since I was four years old, and a baby sister was not quite the answer. I endured years of medical treatments, waiting in hope and disappointment. Then I waited another two and a half years from the time the adoption agency promised us a baby until I actually held him in my arms—this tiny infant so wanted and so hoped-for.

The stories of these Biblical women who waited for a child have always seemed special to me, but somehow this year in particular they seemed to speak to me in new ways.

Hannah sang her joy, Mary's song echoed Hannah's, Elisabeth and Zachariah both sang their joy at a long awaited birth. One of my friends said that the one thing she most remembered about that time of our friendship was my joy at this baby that had come into my life. And that joy transformed my life, as joy transformed the lives of those other people.

Israel was waiting in hope and in expectation for the Promised One. Isaiah sang in anticipatory joy for the Messiah's birth, sang of the transformation this Anointed One would bring to Israel and to all the world. How will the joy of the coming of Jesus transform our lives this Christmas and in this New Year?

Prayer:

Dear God, may we find hope as we wait and work for the coming of your kingdom, and may we find joy as we celebrate your Incarnation.

Amen.

By Peggy Shouse

Fourth Week of Advent
Tuesday, December 23, 2014

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

It had been nine months since he had doubted the hand of God working in their lives. Nine months. In the beginning, it had made sense to stubbornly cling to his denial. After all, the possibility that Elizabeth would be with child was about as likely as—as a virgin being with child. But as she grew larger and larger, he could no longer deny what God was bringing about. Especially after her cousin's visit, she carried herself with a quiet assurance that seemed to be grounded in her faith in the Lord God.

At first he saw his imposed silence as a punishment for his own lack of faith. As the months progressed, though, he began to view it as a blessing. It gave him time to probe scripture, to pray for understanding, to ask for forgiveness. And as the miraculous physical pregnancy took place in her, another pregnancy—equally miraculous but spiritual—occurred in him. Now, they placed the tiny boy in his arms and asked for his son's name. She had told him it should be John. Well, she had been right all along about this child, so if she says the name is John, that is what we shall name him. He held close to his heart the son he had thought he would never hold; in his joyous belief he gave birth to the hymn of praise that had been growing in him in nine months of silence.

Prayer:

God, Mother and Father of us all, we don't have nine months of contemplative silence to devote to praying about the wondrous event that will take place in a few days. But we take the time today to pause with this reflection, to ask forgiveness for our times of doubt in you, to ask for wisdom that we may live in your presence each day of our lives and for gratitude for those moments in which we are aware of that presence.

Amen.

By Janice Bonner

**Fourth Week of Advent
Weds, December 24, 2014
Feast of the Incarnation**

Scripture: Sm. 7: 1-12; Lk. 1: 67-79

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



Christmas Day

Thurs, December 25, 2014

Feast of the Incarnation

Scripture: Is. 52: 7-10, Heb. 1:1-6; Jn. 1: 1-18

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

We plan to celebrate the family Christmas morning, with our traditional customs, perhaps with a Christmas tree gift sharing with the children. When we come to church to celebrate our faith together, there is a different feel than midnight Mass or even an early morning Mass. Still, the choir draws us in immediately. We look at each other and smile and we see the bright eyes of the elderly and single friends around the community. We know why we are here, and it is easy to join in the singing.

Let us give thanks today. Let us repeat the sounding joy of a faith-filled Christmas. Let's go forth to share glad tidings with our family and friends. Let's help our Lord usher in an age of justice and peace, beginning in our own hearts this day.

Intercessions:

At the birth of Jesus, angels proclaimed peace to the world.

We worship him now with joy, and we pray with hearts full of faith:

May your birth bring peace to all.

Lord, fill your holy people with whatever good they need,
- let the mystery of your birth be the source of our peace.

Awaited from the beginning of the world, you came only in the fullness of time,
-now reveal your presence to those who are expecting you.

Prayer:

This day feels so different already, dear Lord. You promised the glory of this day by the birth of Jesus. So humble, so simple, such a complete act of love. Make me one of your people of the light and help me to be faithful to your word. I am filled with the joy of the world and ask you to fill my heart with a longing for your justice and peace.

My savior - you are here with me on this day, bringing life to the waiting world.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Amen.

Taken from Creighton University's Advent Reflections:

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Advent/c-Christmas-Day.html#day>