

# Meditations for Advent

**2011**



Offered by the people of Trinity Cathedral

Dear Friends in Christ,

As the dark and chill of winter descends upon us, we enter the season of Advent, a time for quietly drawing inward and seeking light and warmth in the promise of God. Since 2003, members of the cathedral community have volunteered their creative talents toward the creation of a booklet of meditations for the season of Advent. We offer them to our fellow parishioners and to the wider community via the Internet as a way to engage the Spirit and the season in our daily worship. This year each contributor has written a short meditation based upon the daily lectionary readings from Holy Women Holy Men. (Church Pension Fund, 2010). We hope that you will find it a useful companion on your Advent journey and allow the light of the Word to be born in you this holiday season.

Adam Spencer and Emily Ingalls, editors

**Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>**

**The First Sunday of Advent**

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

Isaiah 64: 1-9

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

The mystery is this: in the bleak midwinter, after that distress (which distress, o Lord?), when heaven's light seems dimmest, with neither sun, nor moon, nor stars burning brightly in the sky, precisely then are we called to watch. Watch, not wait. Look into that black sky for the clouds and the winds and the presence that will bring eternal life.

And like a sailor, we dare not sleep, looking always out to sea, straining to hear the bells that chime each segment of our watch away.

Pam McKee

**Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 122

Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 8:5-13

*"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"*

*"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares."*

*"The centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.'"*

(Matthew 8:5-13)

Basically every social status but peasant is discussed in this gospel reading, so I'm hesitant to go wading into this complicated 1<sup>st</sup> century political landscape. However, I remember Dean Tracey doing so for a reading like this one, and the message stuck with me. I'll repeat her concepts in my own words the way I remember it.

A Roman centurion is not a paragon of virtue. However, he has absolutely unshakeable faith in the efficacy of the Roman system, and everyone under him has absolute faith and fear in that system as well. Those beliefs are what make the system work, and it worked with a brutal effectiveness. On the other hand, what if we indulged John Lennon for a while, and "Imagine[d] all the people // Sharing all the world." What if we had the same unshakeable faith in God's Imperial Reign that the centurion had in Caesar's imperial reign?

If we had that faith, we would say, "Go!" to a teacher, and they would go inspire and equip the next generation. We would say, "Come!" to our neighbors, and work out together what's best for our community. We would say, "Do this!" to ourselves, and we would all do what we truly want in life. God's Imperial Reign is just as real, actually more real, than Caesar's usurping claim to the throne. Just as with Caesar, our belief in God's Reign is what makes it real.

Sean Bryan

**Tuesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 72: 1-8

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Luke 10:21-24

This Holiday season is going to be a difficult one for me. My husband and I come from very “drama-free” extended families. We all get along. It’s like we have an unspoken pact to always be pleasant and respectful. That’s not to say we haven’t had our hardships or that anyone is perfect. Definitely not. We simply choose to avoid drama.

Unfortunately last Holiday season there was an incident. It was a moment of time that has stuck with me for a year now. Some of our extended family threw a party and my husband, our children, and I decided to attend. During a friendly card game, words spoken by friends of our extended family hit me like a truck. They were ugly words that conjured up vile images that took my breath away. I remember starting to shake. I suddenly felt like I was in an episode of my favorite TV show, “All in the Family.” I was Archie Bunker and the room around me wasn’t what I thought it was. I was confused. Disoriented. Everything around me blurred but the people kept talking and laughing. Then the camera zoomed in on me. My face filled the screen. I was suddenly aware of my facial expressions and my movements. I started to sweat and my heart beat faster. I desperately wanted the camera to “get away from me” but it just stayed there... zooming in...waiting for my reaction ...waiting for me to do the right thing. But what was the right thing to do? I am not a person who is easily offended. I went to a rough high school, a large university, and have done a lot of travelling. I live with two teenagers. I like to think my skin has been thickened. So why did these words hit me so hard? Looking back now I realize what I was feeling at that moment was righteousness. To our modern ears, this word, “righteousness,” is a word that is often associated with negative connotations and is misunderstood. “Righteousness” in the Bible is actually a positive word that simply means, “doing what is right”. I knew those ugly words were wrong. I also know now who was on the other side of that camera.

I left the party after those words were said and a whole year has passed without much contact with our extended family. Jesus said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see”. I wish now that I had used this blessing that Jesus bestowed on me, always loving my neighbor as myself, and simply said, “that’s not right, don’t say that”. Maybe it wouldn’t have made any difference, but then again, maybe it would have. And maybe this holiday season wouldn't have to be so difficult.

Julie Gittins

**Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 23

Isaiah 25: 6-9

Matthew 15: 29-39

Growing up on a farm during the Great Depression, we had little of most everything except food. Mama had a seemingly bottomless pot of hearty soup simmering on the stove from morning 'til evening. Frequently, wandering homeless men, asking to trade small jobs for a nourishing meal, were fed from that miraculous pot. A thick slice of rye bread with a spread of fresh butter laced the side of the bowl, followed by a huge wedge of fruit pie...all homemade.

*You prepare a table before me...*

Often city-folks, family and friends, trekked out to our farm to tell and retell stories and, of course, to feast on fresh country food. Dumplings, polenta, fried flowers and buttermilk often graced the kitchen table, during the spinning of family tales... followed by punch lines, which we all knew by heart. Memories of fresh food and funny stories sustain me in stressful times.

*A banquet of food, rich and juicy...*

These were the *companions* (the word means *breaking bread together*), the homeless, the friends, the beloved cousins, aunts and uncles, at our love feasts. Food was meant to be shared: Jesus ate with publicans and prostitutes, as well as Pharisees and the privileged. In our day KG nourishes the hungry and the troubled at A Place at the Table. Tim Smith shows urban dwellers how to till and plant, turning urban deserts into flourishing farms. Scott Blanchard and his team reap rich harvests from once trash-filled, abandoned lots... and all God's people are invited to share and to be made whole in the breaking of the bread.

*They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left...*

Indeed, no one need be hungry, for there is enough for all...in the sharing.

Wayne Bifano

**Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>**

Psalm 118:19-24

Isaiah 26:1-6

Matthew 7:21-27

*"The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Psalm 118:22*

*"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118: 24*

*"Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock." Isaiah 26:4*

*"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise [person] who built [the] house on rock." Matthew 7:24*

"Rock", "everlasting", "cornerstone" – all bedrock words of our faith.

"Rejoice", "trust", "hears", "acts", "build" – all action words of our faith.

All of these words give a feeling of grounding and purpose, of living and growing our faith. A journey...much needed in a world that is troubled and hurting.

Words are powerful and these give us hope, strength, and a reason for waiting, believing, and praying for the Christ Child to be born.

Advent is here and my daily prayer for us all is,

*"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

Christmas will come – of this I have no doubt.

Amen

Debbie Hunter

**Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Psalm 27:1-6, 17-18

Isaiah 29: 17-24

Matthew 9: 27-31

It's that feeling you get when you drive through certain neighborhoods and lock your car doors. It's the sinking in the pit of your stomach when you see the negatively balanced status of your financial income vs. outgo. It's the glances toward someone who is taken out of the security line at the airport for an extra search. It's the guilt from walking in late to an important meeting or class. It can be as basic as awkwardly half-laughing at a derogatory joke just to avoid tension with a new acquaintance. Fear. It has a hold on us for dear life and it affects everything from our eating habits to our social interactions to our child-rearing methods. But it's not always a bad thing. I fear and therefore avoid rhinos, jumping from tall buildings, guns, and old moldy food for very good reasons. Fear is part of our human instinct and therefore can be both thrilling and good for our well being by helping us to protect others and ourselves from danger. On the flip side, fear can be debilitating and problematic when, like a tidal wave, we let regret, worry, and awkwardness hang over our heads instead of jumping on and riding safely to shore. Sounds great in a metaphor, right, but how do we overcome stagnancy and ride that fearful wave in real life? The answer I see from our scriptures is that we overcome fear by trusting in God who is love. Caught in the moment with stomach butterflies and sweaty palms, we rise above the instinct to fear with actions of extravagant love. It's hard to know what that will look like in varied situations, so I'm not suggesting hugging rhinos or surfing in Honolulu during a storm. But there are small, meaningful things we can do every day to dispel fear in this often paranoid and frenzied world. I know that I am most free, confident and unafraid when I have love and support from those around me. I can open the iron curtains to my glass box only when I know I won't be attacked with rocks. How do we create this experience for everyone more often? A suggestion attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt reads, "Every day, do something you're afraid to do." I'll raise that and suggest that every day, we make an intentional motion of love in the face of fear. Just imagine the freedom and relief we will feel, even if we sense that war is breaking out against us, knowing that we can stand and act confidently, overcoming still, cold fear with warm, embracing, and extravagant love.

Gwen Stembridge

**Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Psalm 147: 1-12

Isaiah 30: 19-21, 23-26

Matthew 9: 25 - 10:1, 5-8

How do you become voiceless?

One day you're singing on your way to school.

The next day, you're looking to see who is listening.

One day you're bubbling with plans.

The next week they all seem impossible.

One day you plant your seeds.

The next month the field's filled with henbit.

You knew the words yesterday,

Today they float just outside your memory,

A random few skittering back,

Before taking off again for parts unknown.

Then one day you walk down to the Midway and look up at the stars,

Beyond counting, beyond knowable distance.

A voice larger than yours envelops you

And your own little voice is soaked into it.

You may feel silenced but

Your voice is never gone.

Anastasia Pantsios

**Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**

**The Second Sunday of Advent**

Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13

Isaiah 40: 1-11

2 Peter 3: 8-15

Mark 1: 1-8

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

Today's meditation is brought to you by the word "ALL". As in ALL people shall see it together. It makes me think of the Episcopal Church bumper sticker I like so much:

God loves you.  
No exceptions.

You read that right. NO exceptions. I'll try to remember that the next time I want to jump down someone's throat.

I think this means that God's glory can't possibly be fully revealed until ALL people can see it together; until the unlevel ground (playing field?) has become level and ALL people have a chance to live in peace and safety; until ALL of God's flock (which is all of us, NO exceptions) have been fed and carried and gathered into God's beloved community.

During this season—and ALL seasons—we're called to prepare the way of the Lord by doing what that other Episcopal Church bumper sticker tells us:

Love God.  
Love Your Neighbor.  
Change the World.

Charlotte Nichols

## **Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 85:8-13

Isaiah 35: 1-10

Luke 5:17-26

Isaiah 35 uplifts us with so many promises of changes in the land and the healing of the people. We are exhorted to be strong and not fearful for God will come with recompense for violations of the Law. So many promises of beauty and joy. It makes me hopeful that there will be a purging of the child abuses that we observe, tolerate, and then not speak about. Isaiah describes a "highway that shall be called the Holy Way" where not even fools can go astray. The greatest promise of the Christ Child is that we receive the Child as leading us to the moral high road with no tolerance for child abuse, neglect and covert behaviors. Mankind must stop the abuse of young children by finding a new road.

In Luke Jesus faces the consternation of the Pharisees over his power to forgive sins versus healing the disabled. When we are faced with a scene of child abuse, shall we wait for the solution to come down from above by removing the roof tiles or can action be taken at the scene? I promise this day to change the future of the abused child; I promise to intervene immediately; I promise to offer the abuser a different road. I may feel vulnerable and even threatened by my actions, but the Silent Observer must disappear. Silence is not the promise of the coming of the Christ Child.

Rosalie Tyner

## Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>

Psalm 50: 7-15

Amos 5: 18-24

Matthew 18: 12-14

### Savory Lamb Shanks

1 clove garlic, slivered

4 meaty lamb shanks

salt and pepper

¼ cup flour, for coating

2 tablespoons butter or cooking oil

¾ cup chicken broth

¼ cup white wine

2 small onions, sliced

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

½ teaspoon crushed marjoram

½ teaspoon crushed rosemary

Preheat oven to 300 F. Lightly grease a deep baking dish.

Tuck a sliver of garlic in each lamb shank. Season with salt and pepper and roll in flour.

Melt butter in frying pan over medium-high heat. Add lamb shanks and cook until well browned.

Place in prepared baking dish.

Add broth to pan and bring to a boil, scraping up any browned bits in pan. Reduce heat and add wine, sliced onion and herbs. Simmer for 3 minutes. Pour pan juices over lamb shanks.

Cover dish and bake until shanks are tender, about 1 ½ hours. Serve with pan juices over hot cooked rice.

Yields 4 servings.

Agan, Donna, ed. *Cooking with Herb Scents*. Cleveland, Ohio, The Western Reserve Herb Society, 1991.

**Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 103: 1-10

Isaiah 40: 25-31

Matthew 11: 28-30

Sometimes life seems just plain burdensome. I haul my sorry (burden) out of bed in the morning and drag it around all day. If the morning news doesn't depress me, then the evening's news surely will. It is all so bitter, so callous, so unkind. Some days it just makes me tired, too tired even to find a prayer.

But then something draws me to a window and I see.....birds. *Thousands* of birds are migrating past my house every day -- mergansers, grebes, scaups, and buffleheads on the lake. Juncos, vireos and buntings in my yard. Hawks and harriers overhead. An eagle -- utterly magnificent, strong, graceful. *Different* from other birds. What is this unsearchable understanding so tightly programmed into the DNA of a bird that it cannot resist, but must pick up and fly thousands of miles every fall? Inevitable. Inexorable. Incredible. Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Emily Ingalls

**Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 145:1-4, 8-13

Isaiah 41:13-20

Matthew 11:7-15

*I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Matthew 11:10*

The great theme of John the Baptist, says Karl Barth, is "the pointing hand." John and the other prophets of Israel were men and women "who dared." "The movement into which they all were drawn ... meets us in the Bible in an inescapable way." The movement is from religion and religious experience towards the One who is beyond the experience--who can be seen when a line is drawn from the pointing hand to its object.

In Matthias Gruenewald's painting of the crucifixion, John is a small figure in one corner pointing towards Christ in the center. In this painting, John's "strangely pointing hand" symbolized for Barth the task of our spiritual teachers. That means, ultimately, that we must leave them and follow our own way to Jesus. They can point the way, but not take the journey for us. "How necessary it was for John to point his disciples away from himself to Christ," wrote Martin Luther in a sermon on this text. John was only the "messenger" who "prepares the way."

But in the story there is also a reverse movement--not only our movement towards God but God's movement toward us. John's finger points along a trajectory that leads to Christ, but coming down that road is Jesus himself. Jesus has already closed the distance that separates each of us from him, is already walking toward us. So the "way" that John prepares is a road that leads from Christ to us, a road on which we can take our first steps only to meet the One who is already there and waiting to embrace us. We want to know God, Barth writes, but God already knows us.

Andy Lang

**Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 1

Isaiah 48:17-19

Matthew 11: 16-19

Recently, a co-worker of mine put me in my place, and rightly so. She and I are working on different high profile projects, struggling with different issues on each side. Our projects report on testing status at a daily meeting that I lead. We share resources, both human and technical. Things got a little heated. Instead of saying something out loud, she texted me "I don't appreciate your snotty attitude." Uh oh. Was this on purpose, I asked myself? Did I think I could get away with it? Well, to be honest, yes. I deserved that observation and was glad she didn't declare it out loud to everyone on the call.

It made me stop and listen. I thought about the baptismal vow "check up" Tracey had asked us to consider doing one Sunday. I failed that check on all levels. In that moment I was humbled, embarrassed, ashamed and guilty as charged. I was loitering on the way and sitting with the scoffers. I had taken the advice of what I like to call my "dark side" that operates out of laziness and being too tired to care. I was reminded of my brokenness. Christ would not be finding a room in my mansion with my thoughtless actions.

But thanks be to God that Psalm 1 reminds us of another way. The way of happiness. The way of joy. The way of finding pleasure in obeying the law and of delighting in the Lord. The way of forgiveness. The tree of life with abundant fruit. In the light of Christ that we walk with in Advent, there is great forgiveness. I apologized and she forgave me. I apologized and forgave myself. The light of Christ shines on our darkness and illuminates our good. And that is the best gift of all.

Karla Rivers

**Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 80:1-3, 14-18

Sirach 48: 1-11

Matthew 17:9-13

les saisons d'église humaine

The rhetoric of issues  
and  
the toils of everyday  
evaporate and pass away like  
rotted roots of the poorly tended vine

Through the constant birth  
and death  
of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We realize  
and  
We search for  
the awareness of God  
as  
the Gardener and the Harvester

The Divine constantly flowing  
flowing through us,  
and through all heartbeats.  
We again seek the radiance of  
God in this season,  
as in all days.  
Those that have been, those that are,  
and those that will be

Call out the name of  
the Lord.  
For only then can you  
restore your mind, body, and soul  
perennially pushing upward and onward  
in darkness and light.  
the well tended, as intended,  
Vine

Alex Barton

**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**

**The Third Sunday of Advent**

Psalm 126

Isaiah 61:1-14, 8-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Advent is a time of waiting and anticipation. Since we have walked this way before, we know that at the end of the journey we will find God (or God will find us?), but in a most surprising manner: in the form of a baby lying in a feed trough in some Middle Eastern peasant village.

I am haunted by the many passages in the Bible where people struggle to recognize the presence of God in their midst. For example, the opening chapter of John's Gospel is mostly about the Incarnation of the Word of God, the entry of the Light of God into the World. In other words, it's all about Jesus, even though John's Gospel tells us no story about "a babe lying in a manger." But at the same time that he sings the praises of the Incarnation of the Word, the author of the gospel goes out of his way to warn us not to get confused and misinterpret the presence of God in our midst. John the Baptist is a true agent of God, the evangelist says, bearing true witness to the Light of the World, but apparently it would be easy to misinterpret John the Baptist as the Light, instead of a witness to the Light. As great as John the Baptist is, we are warned against mistaking him for someone even greater for whom he prepares the way.

Apparently people were misinterpreting John the Baptist as "the Light," at the same time that the Light was standing right in their midst, and they were oblivious to his presence: "Among you stands one whom you do not know."

It's easy to get confused. We regularly misinterpret the signals of God's presence in our midst. We misread some signals, while others we completely overlook.

I wonder where and how the feed trough and the baby will show up in our lives this year? I bet it won't be what we are expecting.

Robert M. Fowler

## **Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

Psalms 25: 3-8

Numbers 24: 2-7, 15-17

Matthew 21: 23-27

All three of these passages give me pause to reflect. I read the Numbers passage first where Balaam prophesies a king coming who “shall crush the borderlands of Moab” (v. 17). Language like this brings to mind the violence and retribution of the Old Testament at the same time that it heralds the coming of our Savior. I think as modern-day Christians we are uncomfortable with this type of language. It reminds me of all the pain, suffering, and damage done in the name of a little baby who grew up to preach peace. I think it is important to reflect on the harsher language of the Old Testament because we need to remember so we don’t continue making the same mistakes, and take Advent as the dawning of a new day where we look at the world in a new way.

Thinking of how we must remember this brings me to the passage in Psalms. It contains the usual language and sentiments that we know and love so well from Psalms... worship and mercy. The author is begging the Lord to remember them and forget their misdeeds. “Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions” (v. 7). Only by putting the past year behind us, the past life, the old way of life or testament, can we truly embrace the promise and new life that the tiny baby of Bethlehem is trying to teach us. I struggle with this most of all. I am very good at remembering my personal transgressions from yesterday, or last week, or years ago, but not so good at remembering the hope of the future and what I have done righteously today. Again, a new day is dawning with Advent. We don’t yet know how that new day will manifest itself, but we know the simplest kind of joy and renewal – in the amazing miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Then of course, we come to the Matthew passage. I love this passage. On my first read, I noticed the wisdom of how Jesus addressed the chief priests’ question. He turns the question on them, asking by whose authority they are questioning him without directly insulting or demeaning them. This passage reminds me of how we should be wary of judging others in our thoughts and actions. There are implications for our judgments: we may cause others to fall or we may cause others and ourselves unnecessary pain. Advent marks not only the coming of Jesus’ birth, but also the coming of a new age, the coming of a change in thinking, a change in perception, and a new way of looking at things. Celebrating the Advent season reminds us every year, to let go of the past, to look at the world with new eyes, and to embrace the future.

Rebekah Solt

**Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 34: 1-8

Zephaniah 3: 1-2, 9-13

Matthew 21: 28-32

**Not only with our lips, but in our lives**

This parable in Matthew is a reproofing parable. In it Jesus poses his listeners with a question, and then immediately admonishes them with the answer. As current followers, we must also consider the two forms of denial characterized by each son, and apply the lesson to our lives. The first son denies outright his father's order to work in the vineyard, but ultimately changes his mind – and the son is allowed to work. The second son respectfully agrees to work but does not report to work. Was he simply lying? Was he in denial? How often do we over-commit? Do we ever agree to do something, because our brain knows it is the 'right thing to do' but do not actually commit our heart to the work? Jesus tells us redemption comes when we hope and believe and commit our lives to service in the vineyard.

The crowd listening to Jesus in this parable was not comprised of followers, but people who claimed to be faithful people that could not recognize a Messiah when one was looking them in the eye. In community, together, here at Trinity Cathedral we are offered a life of redemption, and shown ways to tend the vineyard through belief, hope and service in Christ. (We can also literally tend an actual garden in service of others.)

My hope for strength in this mission comes from what is now an 'old fashioned' prayer of thanksgiving that includes these words:

*And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies,  
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,  
and that we show forth thy praise,  
not only with our lips, but in our lives;  
by giving up ourselves to thy service,  
and by walking before thee in holiness  
and righteousness all our days.*

Sounds like a vineyard song to me.

Bryan Gillooly

## Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

Psalm 85: 8-13

Isaiah 45: 5-8 (9-17) 18-25

Luke 7: 24-30

### Old-fashioned English Plum Pudding

1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon soda  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon mace  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon nutmeg  
1 1/2 cups cut-up raisins (1/2 pound)  
2 cups currants (1/2 pound)  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup finely cut-up citron  
1/3 cup cut-up candied orange peel  
1/3 cup cut-up candied lemon peel  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup finely chopped walnuts  
1 1/2 cups soft bread crumbs  
2 cups sweet cream butter (1/2 pound)  
1 cup brown sugar (packed)  
3 eggs, beaten  
1/3 cup currant jelly  
1/4 cup fruit juice

Grease well 2 quart mold. Measure flour, soda, salt, and spices into large bowl.

Stir in fruits, nuts and bread crumbs. Mix suet, brown sugar, eggs, jelly and fruit juice and stir into the flour-fruit mixture.

Pour into ring or turk's head mold and cover tightly with aluminum foil.

Place a rack in a Dutch oven. Pour hot water into the pan up to level of the rack.

Place mold on rack and cover the oven. Keep water simmering on low heat for 4 hours, adding boiling water during steaming if needed.

Unmold while still warm.

This is a make-ahead dessert. Wrap in foil, refrigerate until day of serving.

Reheat in foil in 350 degree oven for 1 hour. Place on ovenproof platter to serve with Hard Sauce or, for a traditional flaming pudding, pour on 1/4 cup heated brandy and light with a match. Celebrate.

Jean Ingalls

**Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 30

Isaiah 54: 1 - 10

Luke 7: 24 - 30

During my youth, summers were filled with visits to the Canadian Rockies. Although I lacked formal religious instruction, I knew from these mountains that God is very, very big. The mountains nurtured in me a grasp of limitless space. Mountains rising on all sides with no foliage to define shape and distance caught my breath and lifted me to a place removed. Those big mountains shaped my imagination and my experience of God.

The prophet Isaiah portrays Jerusalem in the image of a woman. She was barren and is now fruitful, outcast and now honored, forsaken and now embraced. The woman who was despised is liberated in the integrity and generosity of God's favor. She is no longer bound in her relationships but dwells in God's spacious wonder. She rises to a place removed. She shouts for joy.

At the manger, we behold God's limitless favor toward us. We pray, the baby in the manger gathers our entire world's grieving, restores us and lifts us to gratitude and praise. Amen.

Sharon L. Schwenk

**Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 67

Isaiah 56:1-8

John 5:33-36

Advent is a time of waiting. Waiting to bear joyful witness to the incarnation of God into the realm of humanity. Waiting for, in the words' of Isaiah, God's House to be a House of Prayer for All. We are waiting for God but God is also waiting for us. God is waiting for us to recognize the foreigner or stranger or the eunuch (read by some to include homosexuals). God is waiting for us to recognize that anyone who preserves justice and does what is right has a place in the House of the Lord. God is waiting for us not just to recognize but also to rejoice and to join with them. For as Isaiah says "I will gather to them still others besides those already gathered." God is waiting for us. What are we waiting for?

Toni Ponzo

**Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**

Genesis 49: 2, 8-10

Matthew 1: 1-7, 17

Psalms 72: 1-8

I read this passage from the book of Psalms and I am troubled. These verses give the idea that Good will prevail, yet we all know of plenty of cases where Good has not or is not prevailing. For a long time, I wondered how it was possible that there could be injustice, affliction, and oppression if God were all-powerful.

It finally occurred to me that when Evil wins out over Good, it is often because of us. Not God. When God places it on our hearts to share, and we decide to be selfish, we are failing God. When God puts it on our hearts to show compassion and we choose judgment, we are failing God. When God puts it on our hearts to be kind, and we choose callousness, we are failing God. So, this passage also comforts me, because I realize that God's power is easily obtainable. All we need to do is let God steer us, day by day, choice by choice.

I recently read the story "Stone Soup" to my first graders. If you are familiar with this folktale, you know it is about weary travelers who come into an impoverished village asking for food. The villagers claim they have nothing to share until one of the travelers says he is going to make soup with nothing but a stone and some water. Of course, the traveler tells the people, the soup would be better if someone had a few carrots to share. Soon, a villager finds he can spare a bunch of carrots. Not long after that, another villager can spare a potato, another one can spare some salt... Soon, the whole village has worked together to create a feast.

For years, people have been angered over the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. And now people all over the planet have reached the boiling point and are calling for an end to this evil. But that's only a start. If, in small ways, we each can give our wills to God and toss in a little compassion, a little kindness, and a little generosity into this boiling broth, this season of giving will turn into a season of transformation.

Marcie Denton

**Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

**The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Canticle 3 (Book of Common Prayer p. 50)

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

Romans 16: 25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Christmas is a time of giving. Although it is often buried under layers of commercialism and tainted by materialism, the impulse to demonstrate our love for one another by the giving of gifts is both natural and good. When I remember past Christmases, it is the fun of searching for, joy of finding and happiness at my family and friends' reception of the gifts I gave them that I think of even more than the gifts I received. For example, I still have in my possession a slightly chipped, but otherwise whole, ceramic rooster that I bought for my mother when I was nine years old. I can't remember why I thought she would like it, but the fact that she kept it until the day she died, makes it a symbol of her love that warms me whenever I look at it. Her keeping of it was a meaningful gift to me.

When we give to one another out of love and without expectation of receiving something in return, we are acting in God's image as His love for and generosity towards us are, as the readings for today illustrate, the heart of our relationship with Him. The passage from Samuel relates God's gift of a homeland to His people who had wandered for so long. "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me . . ." The promise is made without conditions. In today's world, with so many refugees fleeing violence and poverty in search of safety and sustenance, these words represent both a hope for a better world for those who, like the ancient Hebrews, have wandered searching for a home, and a challenge to us to give what we can to make that hope a reality.

Of all God's gifts to us, the most generous and full expression of His love is His gift of Himself through His Son. Jesus, as a widely displayed bumper sticker reminds us, is the reason for the season. The reading from Luke relates to us the annunciation, when Mary received the news that she was to be the bearer of this gift. Canticle 3, the Magnificat, continues the story with Mary's response to this news. Glorifying and rejoicing in God, she thanks Him for the marvelous thing He has done. In so doing, she sets us an example. God does not ask us to repay His gift. How could so great a gift ever be repaid? But we, like Mary, can thank Him. We can do so not only in prayer and song, but also by following the two great commandments, to love God and to love our neighbor not only at Christmas, but all through the year.

Laura Blunk

## **Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 71: 1-8

Judges 13: 2-7, 24-25

Luke 1: 5-25

*“In thee, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame! In thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline thy ear to me and save me! Psalm 71: 1 RSV*

Judges 13 talks about the birth of Samson to a barren couple. He was to deliver them from hand of the Philistines. Luke foretells the birth of John. John was to turn the people back to their God. Samson and John are to be instruments in saving God’s people. Advent is the time we await the birth of Jesus, the one who is coming for us. Jesus is the one who is coming to connect us to God. There is nothing we can or need to do. God’s Love is there for us, all we need to do is stop, slow down and accept it.

The Psalmist affirms God’s promise to rescue us. In order for us be rescued, we must be willing to let go. In today’s world, surrendering, or letting go is very difficult. We insist on having control of our lives. We want things to go our way and we become anxious if they don’t. Our lives are full of errands, meetings, hauling the kids, shopping and getting ready for Christmas Day. Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting. Both of these require patience. God is very patient with us. God does not force us to do anything. It is up to us to surrender our control and anxiety and let God rescue us from our busyness. There are so many things in the way that can prevent us from finding God’s peace, which is there for the taking. But we must slow down and let it come into us. If we let go, we are able to go deeper into ourselves and listen to God and our fellow human beings and get in touch with peace that is present in our inner selves and God. Meditation is a way to slow down and let God speak to us. Try to find 20 minutes each day to find a comfortable and quiet place to stop, sit still and relax. Concentrate on your breathing, and your body. Let the thoughts churning in your mind go off in a cloud and clear your mind. If your mind goes back to the thoughts that are keeping you agitated and anxious, just gently bring your self back to your breathing and the sensations of your body. Remember, God’s Love is there for us; all we need to do is stop, slow down and accept it.

Carl Stehman

**Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

Psalm 24

Isaiah 7: 10-14

Luke 1: 26-38

The Psalmist foresees the coming; a triumphal parade of the nobles and ladies through lifted gates and everlasting doors to greet the "LORD mighty in Battle".

But others see a different, less conspicuous coming, appealing to other needs:

"He hath filled the hungry with good things—  
Oh listen lords and ladies gay! -  
And the rich he hath sent empty away."

Isaiah writes, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: A young woman is with child and will bear a son and call him Immanuel."

Luke identifies the young woman, not a noble lady at all, but a very poor one.

"Never a lady did He choose,  
Only a maid of low degree"

Thus

"... Christ was never of gentle birth;  
A common man of the common earth".

Mary's response to the angel's message is one of humility and acceptance. " Here am I. I am the Lord's servant".

"So humble she might not refuse  
The carpenter of Galilee:  
A daughter of the people, she".

So here's an Advent message for us:

"And still for men to come she sings,  
Nor shall her singing pass away.  
'He hath filled the hungry with good things-  
And the rich He hath sent empty away' ".

Paul Ingalls

("Our Lady", Mary E. Coleridge 1861-1907)

**Wednesday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**

Psalm 33:1-5, 20-22

Zephaniah 3: 14-18

Luke 1: 39-45

Do you always leap for joy in the presence of God? I don't. Sure, it is always great to hear God's voice; I love that feeling of closeness. And I long to hear it more often – I think.

John, Elizabeth's as yet unborn baby, leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. Wow! Even at that prenatal stage John seemed to know who Mary's baby really was and focus on the great thing that was about to happen. That's pretty amazing. He seemed to already know what the Psalmist said: "Be glad and rejoice with all your heart ... The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm."

If John can be so joyous so early, why do I sometimes hold back? I think it is because sometimes when I hear God there is a message attached: do something. I don't always like the message and resist doing what it is I hear God asking me to do. It might be scary, or hard, or take me out of my comfort zone. It might upend my nice comfortable life or derail my plans.

I find John inspiring. He leapt for joy, said YES and went on to a life that was anything but what one might have reasonably expected. He didn't marry, settle down with a family and live happily ever after; instead he lived in the desert, ate locusts and met an untimely and cruel end. He answered God's challenging call without appearing to lose that joyous response.

I have resisted God's call on occasion. I've learned that God can be very persistent, and in the end I find I am doing what it was He asked all along. All my resistance, my refusals and my excuses can't withstand this persistent God. And, no matter how hard I resisted, I never regretted obeying Him.

Perhaps I should use John as my guide. Perhaps it would be much easier in the long run to simply leap for joy, and embrace God and God's call from the beginning.

Sherry Watts

## Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>

Canticle 9 (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 86)

1 Samuel 1: 19-28

Luke 1: 46-56

Many years ago a young family walked into the empty Church parking lot as I was getting into my car. The man was carrying a little girl in his arms and the child had shoes, but no socks on her small feet. It was November, but their jackets were lightweight. They asked if they could get some food at the Church. It seems the police had told them to go there.

All I could think of was the Holy Family on the Flight to Egypt. Yes, the father carried a little girl, not a boy. There was not a donkey or camel in sight, only cars going by. It was cold, not warm. But they were in need with no place to go, and they were told by another to go to the Church just as Joseph was warned by an angel to go to Egypt.

Is anything really different from the time of Herod? Our children are battered and abused. They are locked in rooms, kept from school. Many go hungry and cold, and some are murdered, bullied and afraid. And they don't have socks! They fear for their lives in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Sudan and also in Cleveland.

This Advent let us do something for our children beyond giving toys. Let us work for peace in families, help parents find jobs, improve our schools, and tell teachers how much we really care about them. Seek decent housing for families and keep our children safe by surrounding them with love and caring people. Keep Christmas simple – and **really** make Jesus the reason for the Season.

Caroline Angus

**Friday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Psalm 25:1-14

Malachi 3: 1-5

Luke 1:67-79

*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. –Psalm 24: 8-9*

We are on a Way whether we know it or not. We walk a path where every step moves a little bit towards wholeness and holiness or a little bit towards destruction; of ourselves, of others, of creation. That's a scary image; that's a scary road. To think that life matters so very much; all the way down to our smallest choices.

God is in the mix with us, as well, all the time; wanting our best. Trying us, pushing us, calling us to be more than we've been, to be what we can even yet still be. We are being refined. "The Lord is a refiner's fire," the Book of Malachi tells us. And fire hurts. I'll never forget the feeling of burning my hand with fire. I've done it more than once, clumsy as I am. The instinct is to pull away. But if we pull away from the Fire of God, we'll never be refined. We'll never grow into the full stature of Christ.

"Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing," says Father Zossima in Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov, "compared to love in dreams. It may very well kill you." Flannery O'Connor puts it another way, "What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross."

But we're not in this alone. The same God who thrusts us into the fire of life feeds us with the Spirit who can lead us into the depths of things if we will only remain awake to movements of Presence and Calling. The evangelist writes: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.*

*Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.*

Adam Spencer

**Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Christmas Eve**

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-29

2 Samuel 7:1-16

Luke 1:67-79

The news that the Angel Gabriel brought to Zechariah was just too good to be true. He and his wife Elizabeth, in their old age and after years of hoping and praying, would finally have a child. And not just any child, but one who would help to set things right, one who would prepare people for the salvation that was to come. Was the shock too great for Zechariah? Or was he punished for his disbelief? Whatever happened, the news left him speechless, literally speechless, he became mute.

He remained mute throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy. After the baby was born, when they asked him what his name was to be, he had to write it on a tablet. The name he wrote wasn't a family name; it was what the angel told him to name his child. As soon as he wrote the name "John," he knew that all that the angel had told him was coming true, his voice returned, and in joy he sang:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
For he hath visited and redeemed his people;  
And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us  
In the house of his servant David.

Over the centuries since then we have sung Zechariah's song -- in Lauds, or Matins, or Morning Prayer. We sing it again today to join our voices with Zechariah who sang it to welcome his child John who welcomed Jesus.

SING IT OUT!

SING IT OUT!

SING IT OUT!

Jim Bolce

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