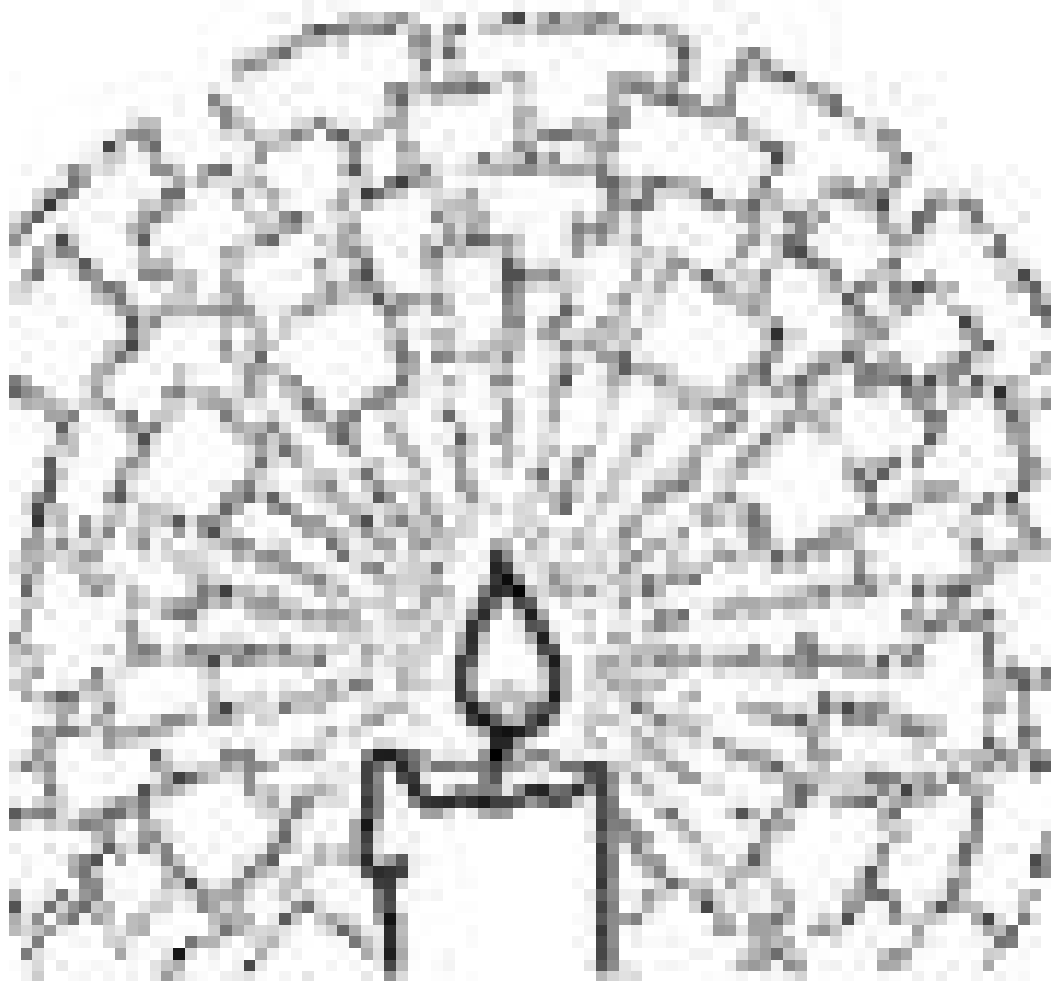


Meditations for Advent



2003

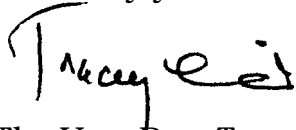
Dear Friends in Christ,

Lectio divina is Latin for “divine reading.” It is actually an ancient form of prayer and meditation, a way of listening to God’s Word and letting it speak to and through us as it takes shape in our bodies, minds and hearts. When we engage in *lectio divina*, we meet the Holy One through the sacred word and allow Divine Wisdom to enter our lives as a friend and companion on the journey. Hence, *lectio divina* is really a way of being in relationship with God through the Word.

This small book of Advent meditations is an offering of *lectio divina*. Under the editorial direction of parishioners Toni Ponzo and Jan Snow, various members of the cathedral congregation wrote these short meditations. Following the daily lectionary for the season of Advent, the contributors have met God’s Word and allowed Divine Wisdom to speak through them.

I intend to use this meditation booklet every morning in the privacy of my study as I seek silence and peace at the beginning of my day. I hope that you will find it a useful companion on your Advent journey and allow the Word to be born in you this holiday season. May you have a blessed time of *lectio divina*, and may the peace of Christ be with you this holiday season.

Faithfully your dean,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracey Lind". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'T'.

The Very Rev. Tracey Lind

Sunday, November 30

Psalm 50

Zechariah 14:4-9

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-31

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The liturgical year affords us not just a sense of time and rhythm, but also a connection with the past and the future. At a time in the calendar when we are naturally fixated on the coming of Jesus of Bethlehem, today's collect makes the connection that Advent is also very much about the Second Coming of Christ with all of the commotion of the Apocalypse.

Amid all the decorating, shopping, party-going and planning that normally occur during the four weeks of Advent, we often lose the connection to what marks Advent as a penitential season: the coming of Christ as Judge. While Advent was never as somber or as strictly kept as Lent, the Western church discouraged festive activities and encouraged fasting to prepare the faithful for Christ's long-awaited arrival. Even today the sanctuary and clergy are draped in sober purple, and the Book of Common Prayer directs that the celebratory hymn, *Gloria in excelsis*, "not be used on the Sundays or ordinary weekdays of Advent" (p. 406).

Make a conscious effort to prepare for the Second as well as the First Advent. This season then becomes a time of connecting our communal joy of the birth of Jesus with our eschatological hope of justice, resurrection, and life eternal in the coming of Christ's glory and reign.

Michael E. Lawrence



Monday, December 1

Psalm 19

Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 8:5-13

I look at today's Psalm and, right off the bat, stub my toe on "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." I'm still nursing that injury when Isaiah tosses me his oft-quoted "swords into plowshares" bit. No way I can grab hold of that. I juggle it from hand to hand like the proverbial hot potato. What am I supposed to do with this? "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war no more." Don't hold your breath, I want to tell the old guy. It ain't happening any time soon.

I don't know how to write about peace when my country is in the thrall of mean-spirited men who seem to put profits for some ahead of justice for all, when more soldiers have died since the end of the official hostilities than during the so-called war itself, when the number of Iraqis killed on my behalf (that's dead people, not casualties, not collateral damage) is seldom mentioned, as if their lives somehow did not matter.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." And Baghdad, Belfast, Kabul, Tehran and Detroit. Who among us has not responded to that imperative, "pray for peace?" Pray for peace? What does that mean? *Dear God, Please stop all the wars, and make Dad buy me a pony for my birthday. Your friend, Jancey.*

I'm overwhelmed, sad, angry. The wars rage on, overseas, in our cities, in our homes and hearts. "Peace be within your walls." I guess I'll start there.

Jan C. Snow



Tuesday, December 2

Psalm 72:1-8

Isaiah 11:1-10

Luke 10:21-24

When the church talks of the “Jesse Tree,” it is referring to the genealogical link of Jesus to Jesse, the father of King David of Israel, as found in Isaiah. Tradition now depicts a tree that shows the common descendents as foliage on the tree, ending with Jesus (or Mary with the baby Jesus).

The image in Isaiah is wonderful. The shoot out of Jesse’s root becomes a branch that then is infused by the spirit of the Lord: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear. It’s a new Tree of Knowledge and Life.

The Jesse Tree leads to a kingdom where nature’s rivals live in peace, and children can play in the presence of serpents without hurt or destruction. The imagery is the reverse of the Garden of Eden story; the Tree of Knowledge and Life that led to the end of the peaceful kingdom is now what leads us back to a state where the rules of nature are trumped by a spirit of oneness.

But we are different than in Eden. Our spirit of care and generosity is as a child’s, but our knowledge is of great wisdom and understanding. We are rooted in our ancestry, and Advent is a wonderful time to remember and reconnect. But then we must not forget to grow! We grow with knowledge and understanding, and find that the Spirit is doing a new and wonderful thing.

Kurt Wiesner



Wednesday, December 3

Psalm 23

Isaiah 25:6-9

Matthew 15:29-39

How can you, Jesus, feed us? We are stuffed. Our bellies are full of food. Our minds are crammed with ad jingles. Our tastes are dulled by lust for the quick fix of fast food. We have the constant companionship of our cell phones to assure us that we are needed. Every night the TV news confronts us with the vicarious horror of today's drive-by shooting, the latest lethal Israeli-Palestinian tit-for-tat, or some other distant aberration. No, we won't faint from hunger. We are more likely to fall into a stupor and become more and more insensitive to the real hunger in the world around us.

We need some food other than what we buy so eagerly from the world. But before we can stuff another bite into our maws, we need to empty ourselves, to do some fasting. We buy what the world offers because it is very carefully designed to stroke our egos, to make us feel good. The more we learn that our real worth does not depend on those strokes but on God's love for us, the less we will need those ego strokes. Then we will find that God has prepared a feast for us.

Help us, Jesus, to find the hunger within that craves your love. It was because of your compassion that you told the disciples to feed the crowd. Feed us with your compassion so that like those disciples we too can feed the crowd.

Jim Bolce



Thursday, December 4

Psalm 118:19-24

Isaiah 26:1-6

Matthew 7:21-27

It always amazes me how biblical passages speak to the circumstances I find myself in. The Isaiah, Matthew and Psalm passages today all concern strong foundations and open gates. Isaiah says we have a strong city with open gates to protect and welcome the righteous. In Matthew, Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish men who built respectively on rock and sand with predictable results when bad weather moved in. And finally, the Psalm describes the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter, as well as the stone rejected by the builders, which becomes the head of the corner.

Right now I feel a particular need for a gate through which I can enter, a gate leading into strength. Sometimes I need to ask God for an extra portion of faith. I feel that need now, and at the same time I know that I must rely on my own devices to intelligently see me through a difficult time. I can ask God for help, but I can't give up myself. The old saying is that God helps those who help themselves. This is what I am doing in order to walk through the gate into the safe city or the strong house.

Michael Wells



Friday, December 5

Psalm 27:1-6,17-18

Isaiah 29:17-24

Matthew 9:27-31

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus has just healed the woman with the issue of blood and brought the daughter of the rich man back to life. After these happenings, we are told that two blind men follow after Jesus begging, "Lord have mercy on us." We are told nothing about these men except that they are blind, which raises several intriguing questions. How long had these men been following along in the crowd? How long had they been hanging back, afraid to ask Jesus for help? Did they come believing that Jesus could heal them or did they need to see proof before they were convinced? Interestingly enough, Jesus asks them only one question: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" When they answer "yes," it is done. Was Jesus waiting, waiting for this "yes?"

Are we following along after the crowd, waiting to see what will happen before asking God for help? Are we able to answer "yes" to the question, "Do you believe I can do this?" Or do we need to be convinced? Maybe we have this reading during the season of waiting to remind us that just as we are waiting on God, God also is waiting on us.

Toni Ponzo



Saturday, December 6

Psalm 147:1-12

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5-8

□ I love it when scripture offers me contradictions. I think harder about what I'm reading and get more out of it.

In today's readings, Isaiah says, "the Lord give[s] you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction." Sounds like fun. But then the prophet says the same Lord "binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow." And according to Psalms, "the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love." So God wants to be feared and loved? Sounds like God has some issues.

□□□□□□□□□□ After considering it, I think maybe the Bible is telling me that our forgiving God is also a proponent of "tough love." I've often found that my most meaningful periods of personal growth come when I am able to stand up to the worst life has to offer. Anybody can succeed when everything is hunky-dory. But if your marriage, your faith and your God-given skills and talents can thrive in times of deep pain and humiliation, you've got something worth having.

□□□□□□□□□□ In Advent, we're meant to solemnly take stock of our lives. This year, I'm going to try to find ways to count my shortcomings and defeats as blessings. The acts of overcoming them, coping with them, accepting them and sometimes even surrendering to them, make me stronger and more humble.

□□□□□□□□□□ My prayer for today is, "Thank you God, for kicking my butt when it's the best thing for me."

□

Tony Brown



Sunday, December 7

Psalm 126

Baruch 5:1-9

Philippians 1:1-11

Luke 3:1-6

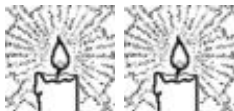
Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

I've been thinking a lot about salvation. I'm not sure how God's messengers prepare the way for our salvation. But I am keen on greeting with joy the coming of Jesus. What do these ideas mean for me, for our time?

What if I think of salvation as a process rather than an event? Maybe salvation is the process of shaking off everything that keeps us from being whole - negativism, cynicism, sarcasm, any form of fear. Maybe salvation is growing into the fullness of the light of God. Remember that story about not hiding your light under a bushel basket? Maybe salvation is using my gifts to serve God. (But how?) Maybe salvation is being brought into a community of God, a community of love, now. Maybe salvation is something we live for, rather than die for.

As I contemplate the season of Advent, I wonder what steps I will take on the path OF (not TO) salvation. If I'm on the path, anywhere on it, how can I do anything but "greet with joy the coming of Jesus?"

Marie Curry



Monday, December 8

Psalm 85:8-13

Isaiah 35:1-10

Luke 5:17-26

This is the dark time of the year. The coleus on my windowsill is pale. And lopsided. Unless I remember to turn it every day, it plasters itself against the glass like a cartoon hobo salivating at the bakery case. My poor potted plant is desperately seeking sunshine. The leaves curl from the cold and turn brown where they touch the pane. Phototropic to a fault, the plant would sooner sacrifice its foliage than give up trying to reach the light. It can't help itself. My coleus "knows," with unalterable chemical certainty, that to have light is to have life. And vice versa.

We humans have long since left our chloroplasts by the side of the evolutionary road, trading the ability to synthesize food from sunshine and water for other, equally complicated talents. Yet that same certainty lurks in our DNA. We know that we need light. We crave it. Every December as the days shorten and gray blankets the sky, we burn candles and fill our yards with twinkling Rudolph statues. We gather our families and reach out to friends. We are desperate to conjure back the life-giving light, without and within. And every year, we seem to pull it off! Every year Christmas comes and bright hope seeps into the dim reaches of our cynicism.

Here, now, in the gloaming of this Advent, leaning toward the light is what we're all about. We do not yet bask in it, but we know with certainty that it's on the way.

Jan C. Snow



Tuesday, December 9

Psalm 96

Isaiah 40:1-11

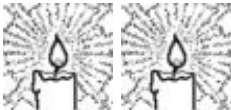
Matthew 18:12-14

Today's Gospel tells the parable of the lost sheep. "And if (the shepherd) finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray."

Upon reading this, I am reminded of a couple of heartening news events that occurred this past year in which lost sheep were reunited with their flocks as all of America rejoiced. In March, our eyes glistened as we saw the safe return of Elizabeth Smart to her family when many of us had given up hope that she would be found alive. In April, our hearts swelled again as we saw photos of the young, courageous Jessica Lynch being reclaimed by her comrades.

Currently, our own flock, the Episcopal Church, is working to mend fences with some conservative clerics who feel compelled to seek new pastures as a result of the landmark decisions made at the annual convention in August. In this difficult time, we feel joy at the tremendous victories achieved by those decisions. But the real rejoicing will occur when our prayers for tolerance and sensitivity have been answered and our lost sheep are safely returned. In this solemn period of Advent, we pray for those who are lost, and we give thanks for those who have been gracefully carried home by the Lord, our shepherd.

Pam Lilley



Wednesday, December 10

Psalm 103:1-10

Isaiah 40:25-31

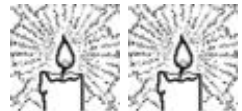
Matthew 11:28-30

Those who are humble and know their own emptiness can learn, expand their horizons, and receive the abundance of knowledge, wisdom and grace from Christ. Those who glorify themselves cannot learn from the wisdom and grace of Christ.

All can be accepted and forgiven by Christ, and we are expected to do no less. We are to give love, kindness and tender mercies to everyone. Without humbleness of spirit, forgiveness of others is difficult, sometimes even impossible, because we do not see our own need for forgiveness. Without recognizing this need in ourselves we do not have the ability to respond to it in others. We must ask God's forgiveness and respond to it by forgiving others.

During this season of Advent we need to look at how we glorify ourselves, thereby denying ourselves the gift of God's forgiveness. We need to look for ways to humble ourselves, opening ourselves to God's grace and enabling us to extend that grace to others.

Michelle Spain



Thursday, December 11

Psalm 145:1-4, 8-13

Isaiah 41:31-20

Matthew 11:7-15

Advent is the story of the coming of the Messiah, the birth of Jesus Christ. There are two principal guides to help us through the lectionary readings. The first is the prophet Isaiah whose predictions about the coming of the Messiah we began to read last week. The second is John the Baptist whom we meet in today's reading from Matthew, and who will appear again in almost every Gospel reading until the end of Advent.

In the first selection, we read a tender, consoling passage from Second Isaiah in which Isaiah seeks to comfort the Jews who have been held in captivity and to assure them that God is the helper of Israel.

Psalm 145 is a song of praise of the greatness and goodness of God. In a kind of counterpoint to God's assurance that He is the helper of Israel, the psalmist replies, "I will extol you, my God and king; I will bless your name forever."

In the passage from Matthew, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the greatest of all the prophets and says that John the Baptist is the great prophet Elijah who was to come again. John, like Elijah, prepared people's hearts for the coming of the Messiah by urging them to repent for their sins and change their lives for good. Unfortunately, John was killed by King Herod and did not live to see Christ's mission fulfilled by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, as we have.

Ambrose A. Clegg



Friday, December 12

Psalm 1

Isaiah 48:17-19

Matthew 11:16-19

The memory is still clear in my body/mind. I was sitting at the lunch table with my co-workers on a hot August day, eight months pregnant with my first child. The city, my job, our marriage and my “condition” still felt new to me. I was off-balance when I walked or when I stopped to think or feel. I’d read the baby books, repainted the family crib, but was I really prepared for the inevitable unknown? I felt alone and disconnected as the table conversation buzzed about our impending work evaluation.

Just then, the baby moved in me with an insistent, increasing pressure. The new, inseparable life had my full attention. Everything shifted. I took a deep, involuntary breath, released a sigh, and felt my whole body relax, flooded with peace. I felt reconnected to my self, my friends and the future. Life Energy revived me.

That memory still teaches me. When I am still and allow my attention to be drawn to the life unfolding in and beyond me, I discover peace in place of fear. I find the Holy Presence is in the present moment.

How will I respond to the invitations of Advent? Will I be still and release my fears? Will I say “yes” to my intimate connection with the mystery of God and with the world? Will I trust the insistent, increasing presence to reveal new life? Will I give myself, my attention and energy, to support the moments of new life I perceive?

Nancy Rich



Saturday, December 13

Psalm 80:1-3, 14-18

Sirach 48:1-11

Matthew 17:9-13

The Gospel reading for this day has always given me a bit of a problem. Why here and elsewhere does Jesus tell the disciples not to reveal what they have witnessed? I would think that this Good News should be shouted from the rooftops. Don't we feel that way when we first receive a wonderful gift? Many times when I am pondering something a song will come to mind and help clarify matters. There is a contemporary gospel song that speaks of hiding the word (of God) deep in our hearts so that whenever we feel afraid we can praise the Lord. Could this be what Jesus means when he tells people not to speak of what they have seen or experienced? Are we to keep the Good News deep in our hearts, where it can gestate like a baby in the womb, so that in times of fear and trouble we can still bring forth praises to God?

Toni Ponzo



Sunday, December 14

Psalm 85

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Philippians 4:4-7(8-9)

Luke 3:7-18

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen

When is the last time you prayed to get all worked up? Usually when we are riled, we risk tearing into someone around us, acting outside the bounds of righteousness. Over-reaction is part of human nature and, I believe, a sin. It may provide temporary relief, but will cause more problems down the road. When we get stirred up with our own power, we often need to cool down before we can see a lasting solution.

But what could happen if we got worked up with divine power? What would it take to get riled by the Holy Spirit? Today's collect beckons the power of God to stir in our midst, to enter our every action. By this invitation we pledge to shape our lives knowing God's presence. When invited, God will have us do more than imagine the good things God can do.

I expect that with God's presence, justice arrives. When we accept divine presence, we usher justice into the world around us, which brings lasting good.

When God stirs me with great might, I remember my needs get met and I can better set aside my anger, anxiety and fear. With God's power, we identify with others, not seek to overcome them. With God's power, our actions help bridge the divides of human-kind that breach lasting peace. Stir me up, I pray.

Bryan Gillooly



Monday, December 15

Psalm 25:3-8

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a

Matthew 21:23-27

Each of the four canonical gospels goes out of its way to subordinate John the Baptist to Jesus. This is hardly surprising, since as Christians we assume that whereas John is merely the Baptist, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. It is curious, therefore, that Jesus unfailingly gives honor to John the Baptist. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying: "Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist" (11:11). Jesus seems to have held a higher opinion of John than the writers of the gospels and most Christians throughout history.

But of course, John was an outsider to the early Jesus movement; indeed, he was the leader of a rival faction within first-century Judaism. Although Jesus and John may have thought highly of each other, their respective followers were not as generous in spirit. It is the human way, after all, to denigrate, and not respect, the outsider.

Sometimes, however, aid, encouragement or a word of truth comes from the outsider. Such was the case of the odd Old Testament character Balaam, the foreign prophet who was hired to curse the Israelites, but who found that he could not. Hired to curse, he could only bless, for even he, the foreigner, heard "the words of God," possessed "knowledge of the Most High," and saw "the vision of the Almighty." Would that those who regard themselves as God's own people had such intimate experience of God!

Robert Fowler



Tuesday, December 16

Psalm 34:1-8

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

Matthew 21:28-32

Today's Psalm is one of praise and encouragement, and yet a challenge. The psalmist begins by speaking of always thanking the Lord and vowing never to stop praising God. The verses encourage us to pray to and rely on God when fearful, alone, or oppressed. The concluding words are especially clear: "Find out for yourself how good the Lord is. Happy are those who find safety with him."

These are words not just to cheer, but to challenge, for they lead clearly to the question: In what or in whom do I trust? Where do I look for shelter, for security? Virtually every aspect of our culture, not simply in the U.S. but throughout the world, encourages us to put our trust in ourselves, our possessions, our money market or investment accounts. We talk a great deal about "trusting in the Lord," but our actions speak otherwise.

Rather than just being words of cheer, these truly are words of challenge. We are encouraged especially during this season of preparation to rely less on our goods and personal skills, and more on God's mercy and grace. We need to embrace this aspect of preparation for Christmas, and work to remake what we value, to re-imagine in what and in whom we truly trust, and what will receive our deepest nurture. This preparation for Christmas is key, for were we not to truly need the Savior, there would be little need for that wonderful day.

David Cogan



Wednesday, December 17

Psalm 85:8-13

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

Luke 7:19-23

The message of Isaiah calls out to us as clearly today as it did when it was written. We live in a world where wars and revolutions erupt regularly, and terrorism threatens millions of people. This violence has steadily escalated since the “war to end all wars” and shows no sign of stopping. We just don’t seem to be able to get it right.

And still God invites us to assemble and draw near.

What idols are getting in our way and keeping us from seeing the truth, and why do they have such a pull on us? When we look closely at our lives we find the idols. For some of us it’s money or power. Sometimes it’s a person, an ideal or even a flag. Whatever these idols are, we raise them up from our greed, our pride, our pain and our fear. They come from our humanness, not our godliness. They come from lies instead of the truth, and so are destined to disappoint us. The harder we try to hold onto them, the more havoc they create in our lives.

But there is one thing we can worship that is good and true, one that is known to us in love and faith. That is God, the one who saves. When we trust in God to manage our lives, we don’t need the idols.

Sherry Watts



Thursday, December 18

Psalm 30

Isaiah 54:1-10

Luke 7:24-30

“It can’t get any worse than this, right?”

How many times have we said those words, either to ourselves or to another person? At the time we say them, it really does feel as if we have hit rock bottom. As the parents of young children, my wife and I find ourselves saying that more often than before. God has certainly blessed our lives with two joyous and wonderful children . . . who do not enjoy going to bed! This is routine in most households with kids, I am sure. But when that rare instance occurs that both are up, inconsolable and wanting attention, I hear myself cry out [to God or Marcie, to whoever chooses to listen], “I have NOTHING left to give to them!”

I am certain that over the course of our children’s lifetime, these instances, although not forgotten, will not seem as unpleasant as they were at the time. The writer of Isaiah says the same thing of God. This personification of God as one who turns away from us only to reappear more loving and understanding is, I feel, meant to be reassuring to us. The overall theme meant for us could be that love and compassion will reign in the end. It is this message of hope that keeps us looking past the bad, the low, the alone times, knowing that the good, the high and the welcome of friends are ahead.

Chris Vandall



Friday, December 19

Psalm 67

Isaiah 56:1-10

John 5:33-36

Today's Old Testament reading and Psalm emphasize that our human prejudices and limitations will not bind God's love. Our God "gathers the outcasts" and is always seeking others "besides those already gathered." These words both challenge and encourage us in our call to radical hospitality here at Trinity. They challenge and encourage us to move beyond our notions of what is comfortable or acceptable.

This passage leads me to look at my own tendency to cast certain people out of my heart. Who are these people? Sometimes they are those who look, think or act in ways that seem beyond my ability to accept them. Sometimes they are people whose words or actions have hurt or frightened me. Often they are those who remind me of parts of myself I'd rather not acknowledge.

We can be so hard on ourselves and inevitably that leads us to be hard on others. Sometimes when I pray, "Lord, have mercy," I sense that I am really the one who needs to have mercy, on myself and on others. God already does.

Charlotte Nichols



Saturday, December 20

Psalm 24

Isaiah 7:10-14

Luke 1:26-38

I'm with Ahaz. No way am I gonna ask God for a sign. When God has to spell it out for you, wow, are you ever in trouble! God spells it out through a burning bush, or an angel who wants to wrestle all night and fights dirty to boot, or God tells you to sacrifice your own son on the altar instead of a goat. When God gives you a sign, God grabs you by the scruff of the neck, and your quiet little life at home is over. You suddenly find yourself leading a cantankerous people through the wilderness, or standing alone in an arena with lions, or dying for a cause. No thank you, I don't want a sign from God. I'll just bury my little head in this hole over here, thanks anyway.

Mary got a sign from God. An angel who said he had good news. I think I would have said, buddy, you have the **WRONG** address! Must be some other woman. You took a wrong turn. You want me to **WHAT?** Bear a child out of wedlock? No thanks, you find somebody else for that job. You go right ahead and save the world with somebody else, thanks.

But Mary said yes. You go, girl!

Emily Ingalls



Sunday, December 21

Psalm 33:1-5,20-22

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Luke 1:39-45

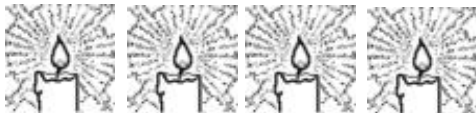
We beseech thee, Almighty God, to purify our consciences by thy daily visitation, that when thy Son our Lord cometh he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? Why me, God? Why now? Most of us have uttered these questions, or similar ones, when life has taken a bad turn, when we find ourselves the victim, when circumstances don't gel the way we had hoped. Several years ago, Rabbi Harold Kushner attempted to solve this mystery for us in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Reading it may have comforted us, but it may also have left our fundamental question unanswered.

In today's reading from Luke, Elizabeth exclaims to Mary, "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" Her "why?" comes from a totally opposite perspective. Something wonderful is happening and she doesn't think that she deserves it. Possibly the answer to the question, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" is worth pursuing. We may feel uncomfortable with describing ourselves as "bad," but at least let us indulge ourselves with the word "undeserving."

In a few days, Christians will celebrate a gift no one in the world has ever deserved - the gift of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer for all of humankind. So, why DO good things happen to "bad" people?

Sam Dittmar



Monday, December 22

Canticle 9 or 113 or 122

I Samuel 1:19-28

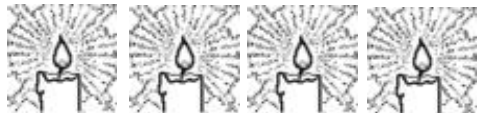
Luke 1:46-56

Sometimes I meet people who seem to breathe fresh air wherever they go, like they're from Maine or Hawaii, and they've brought the breeze with them. Or like the line from the folk song, "Her ways were free, and it seemed to me that Sunshine walked beside her." They are people who, in a hundred different ways, reach out to other people - strangers, misfits, the uncertain - with trust, without fear. They look you straight in the eye where others might look away. And they smile.

I don't know how they do it. They don't always identify themselves as Christians, or talk about God. But by not being afraid, they have made their lives into celebrations. I have glimpses of this in my own life when I recognize that behind every dark thought, sour mood, or white-hot burst of anger is fear, and then I am able to begin to let it float away.

One of the things Isaiah instructs us to say when giving thanks is, "God is my song." When I read about praising God and singing praises and ringing out with joy, I don't read it as a command or an exhortation. To me, it's a prediction. If I can trust and let fear dissolve, my life will be a song.

Brant Lee



Tuesday, December 23

Psalm 25:1-14

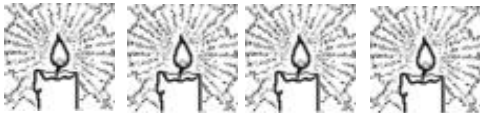
Malachi 3:1-5

Luke 1:57-66

A selection from *The Nutcracker* fills the car. I have been pondering what I will write for an Advent meditation. Everything has gone wrong this morning; everything distresses and disturbs me. I am not a nice person, totally impatient, and I know it. Zechariah comes for a visit, sits here on the side of my laptop, feet and robes dangling off the edge. He just smiles, smiles in the silence. He reminds me that I need to be silent. I need to listen and not talk, not react. Just listen. How can I when I am lost in the madness and noise of my unbelief? I need to pause awhile and know that God is God, always there, always forgiving. I need to anchor myself in the silence, in Christ, center on the good, the breath of life, push away the thoughts that come up. I need to rejoice in the gentle tapping of the keys under my fingers, in the words that seem to flow easily, the wafting of blackberry plum tea, the crispy tartness of a cold fall apple, the post card of a water's edge somewhere in Ontario. My first thoughts can be like Mary's: "I am your handmaiden."

Only by centering on God's love and the light of Christ that comes to us always and fills every season can my unbelief be circumcised. Only then can I be free to give my soul a name and encounter the joy in the world that surrounds me.

Karla Rivers-Graska



Wednesday, December 24

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-29

2 Samuel 7:1-16

Luke 1:67-79

The words “forever,” and “steadfast love” recur in the Christmas Eve readings. In our lives, we are often focused on “now,” and “concrete results.” Countering that focus is God, who is always with us, offering steadfast love forever. As we end our wait for the birth of Jesus, many of us spend time with family and friends who have been in our lives forever and have offered us steadfast love. Some of us look forward to celebrating with newer families of choice. God’s love, recycled and made available anew to each generation, comes to us in many guises. The magic of Christmas Eve is the enormity, variety and constancy of that love.

Allison Hauserman



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES

SUNDAYS

8:00a Early Eucharist • 9:00a Contemporary Celebration
11:15a Choral Eucharist • 4:00p Choral Evensong

TUESDAYS

7:45a Eucharist • 6:00p Labyrinth Walk

WEDNESDAYS

6:00p Choral Evensong (through December 17)

THURSDAYS

12:10p Eucharist and Healing Services

SPECIAL SERVICES AND THEMES

November 30 • The First Sunday of Advent

11:15a Lessons and Carols for Advent

4:00p Choral Evensong: Choir of Trinity, New Philadelphia

December 7 • The Second Sunday of Advent

9:00a The Jesse Tree

December 15 • The Third Sunday of Advent

9:00a Los Posados

December 22 • The Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:00a Dramatic Enactment of the Gospel

December 24 • □Christmas Eve

5:00p Family Service and Pageant

11:00p Midnight Eucharist

December 25 • Christmas Day

10:00a Baptism and Christmas Day Eucharist

December 28 • □The First Sunday after Christmas

3:00p & 5:00p The Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival



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