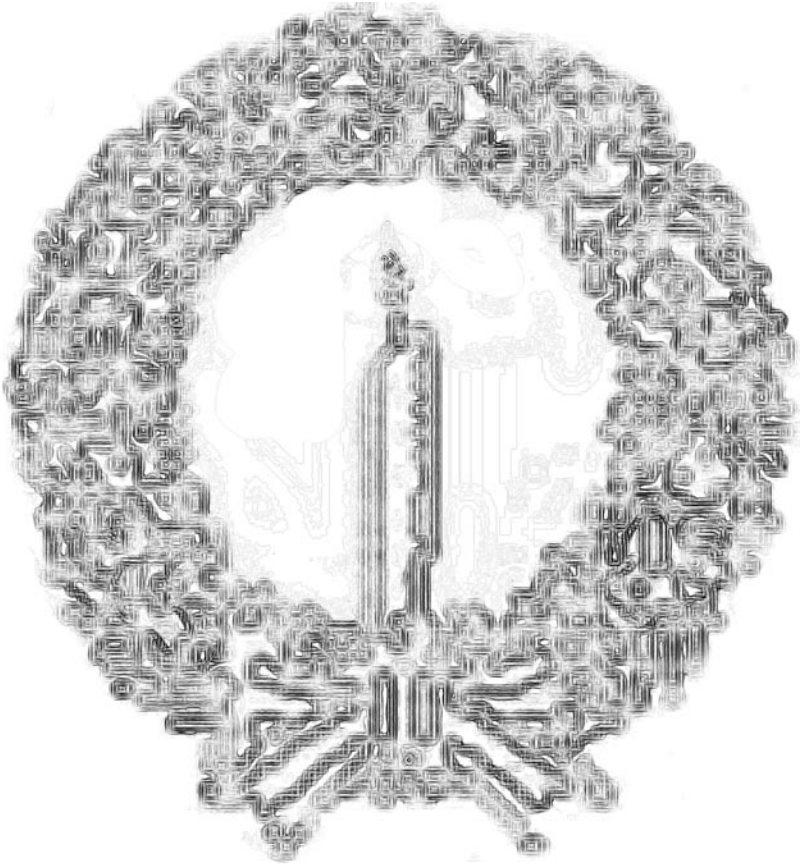


Meditations for Advent 2004

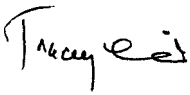
Dear Friends in Christ,

Lectio divina is a Latin word 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 in this holiday season.

Faithfully your dean,



The Very Rev. Tracey Lind

Sunday, November 28, 2004

Collect 159 or 211
Psalm 122
Isaiah 2:1-5
Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 24:37-44

In a creative writing class, we are given an assignment to make a list from given prompts. List four or five items under each topic: colors, people, places, secrets, dreams. These lists can be turned into poems, character traits, mind maps for other lists, even whole stories. Two of the prompts I find difficult – best things and worst things about being alive in the world today. My best things are mobility, freedom, convenience items and information through research. My worst things are the threat of war and terrorism, media overload, loss of identity and health issues. I wonder how Isaiah, St. Paul and Christ would answer these, using the perspective of their given age.

The ten commandments mentioned in Romans 13 is a list, an ancient one, still relevant today, to be used as a guide for keeping peace with God, our fellow man and ourselves. It is a list of ideas on how to be good stewards of our vineyards and how to keep out of debt.

A common thread through the ages is that we are fragile creatures, yet God has made us children of the light. We can take the commandments and our hope in Christ, and move out of the darkness through the twilight, where abstract shadows and secrets dwell, into the brilliant light of Advent.

What do you want from Advent? What are your expectations of the Christmas season? What do you want to accomplish in 2005? Go make some lists and may peace be with you.

Karla Rivers

Monday, November 29, 2004

Psalm 122
Isaiah 4:2-6
Matthew 8:5-13

I really had to think about what Advent was to me. Believe me, it was a deep trip down memory lane. Advent wreaths came to mind in particular. I love that tradition. The origins of the Advent wreath are found in folk practices of the pre-Christian Germanic people who chose to bring color into the cold darkness of winter. The wreaths, made of evergreen and lighted, were symbols of hope in a coming spring and renewed light. So what does that mean to us today? This is where the brain strain came from. Think about it…what DOES Advent mean to YOU? We are about to embark upon a joyous time of year with a definitely ugly side, a dark, nasty side that generally appears in the stores where we are all dashing about. Again, what does Advent mean to YOU? How does one take back the hope/peace and waiting for the mystery? Take them back with the Advent wreath. Take them back with family time and acknowledgment of what the season is truly about. Peace will come.

"As our nights grow longer and our days grow short, we look on these earthly signs—light and green branches—and remember God's promise to our world: Christ, our Light and our Hope, will come."

Heidi Thomas

Tuesday, November 30 (St. Andrew's Day)

Collect 185 or 237
Psalm 19
Deuteronomy 30:11-14
Romans 10:8b-18
Matthew 4:18-22

> *Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

My earliest memory of church is of sitting on a rug on the nursery floor, singing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I believed with all my heart that Jesus loved me, but not because the Bible told me so. I couldn't read the Bible. I believed it because Mrs. Nicholasen told me so. Mrs. Nicholasen was the gentle, white-haired teacher who taught us that song. She was clearly living the promise that we all make when we renew our baptismal vows. She was proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. She proclaimed that Good News each time she welcomed her young charges into her classroom. She proclaimed that Good News when she visited me at home recovering from a childhood illness. I treasured the gift she brought, a little white apron with a heart-shaped pocket, for years. Mrs. Nicholasen was a "St. Andrew" to me. She had answered the call of Christ and she was bringing those near to her along.

We can all be a "St. Andrew" to someone. No theological degrees are necessary. All we need is a willingness to share the word that is near us, the word that is on our lips and in our hearts (Rom. 10:8). Sometimes we speak the word of God's love without speaking - through our smiles, our simple acts of kindness, our prayers. Dramatic conversions are rare. Most of us find our way to belief in God's love through the loving words and actions of "ordinary" people like you and me.

Charlotte Nichols

Wednesday, December 1, 2004

Psalm 15 or 112:1-9
Galatians 6:7-10
Matthew 13:47-52

Matthew 13:47-52 is the last in a series of parables about the Kingdom of God. It is one of those parables that most of us don't know what to make of; it describes the Kingdom as a place of judgment where the righteous receive their reward of everlasting life while the sinners are thrown into "the furnace of fire." That's pretty good as a text for a Puritan sermon or for evangelicals who are dead sure that their belief guarantees admission into the Kingdom. But what does it mean to me, a rather sophisticated, somewhat intellectual 21st century, liberal Episcopalian?

When I finally cut through the imagery, it means pretty much what it says: that I face judgment for my actions, not just at the end of my life but all the time. It means that I live in a moral world where my actions have consequences and I need some way to face the outcomes of what I do. One of the problems with using the text from Matthew is that our knee-jerk reaction seems to be to dwell on how we can attain the Kingdom and avoid the fire. But maybe that's not the point. Maybe the point is who is making the judgment. That's God. We need to know that he will judge with infinite justice and with infinite mercy. It is this faith that God is both just and merciful that lets us lead moral lives without fear that God is going to second-guess us at the final judgment.

Finally, knowing this we will, as Paul says in Galatians (6:9), "not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all."

Jim Bolce

Thursday, December 2, 2004

Psalm 96:1-7 or 98:1-4
Acts 1:1-9
Luke 10:1-9

Well, this is a joyous and upbeat psalm, but I was kind of wondering why it always has to be a new song that we sing when we praise God and marvel at greatness. Why not one of the old familiar favorites? And I think that in those moments when we are suddenly aware of the sun shining, or the quality of friendship, or a small child giggling helplessly, it is always, in a way, fresh. The sacred spontaneity of that awareness is constantly in the state of coming into being. We don't remain aware so much as we continually become aware. I think maybe this is the connection of art to the sacred—creative inspiration is always raw and open and full of energy and promise.

I sometimes instinctively cringe at the language that says to revere God above all other gods, because it brings to mind the exclusive and possessive way in which some Christians press their cause on a world full of diverse and rich spiritual traditions. But this time when I read the part that says that "the gods of the peoples are idols," it struck me that any god can become an idol when that direct spiritual connection to the universal sacred hardens into religious doctrine. That's when people start to worship the ideology and the beliefs and the institutions rather than the actual presence of God. We follow Jesus because of the presence of God that was in him. All the rest is gloss.

Brant Lee

Friday, December 3, 2004

Psalm 27:1-6, 17-18
Isaiah 29:17-24
Matthew 9:27-31

> *The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?*
> *The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*
>
> Psalm 27:1

I was bellyaching with a colleague about a project gone wrong and miscellaneous annoyances at work. He commented, "If we had superpowers, we wouldn't care about this minor stuff. We would be out saving the world." I agreed, thinking that the Power Puff Girls probably don't worry about a project running late when they're fighting to save Townsville from Mojo Jojo.

Psalm 27:1 reminds me of the "superhuman" power we do have: God's love. Every moment we have unity with God and all the majesty and mystery that it brings. We only have to recognize it. If we live our lives in that love and spread it to others, then minor annoyances and gossip become irrelevant. When we get bogged down in the negativity so prevalent today, we simply need to remember that we are surrounded by the uplifting force of God's love.

Joyanna Blake

Saturday, December 4, 2004

1 Corinthians 15: 12-20
Psalm 118: 14-21
Psalm 16: 5-11
John 5: 24-27

St. Paul drives me crazy. Reading his letters to his first-century church in Corinth, I wonder that there was any church left by the time he belabored his point. "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile…." Well, duh. My 21st century mind and training tell me that resurrection is at the heart of Christianity. What was going on in Corinth that made it necessary for Paul to be so lugubrious?

Corinth was having growing pains. Factions had split the church. The ones who favored Apollos were educated, wealthier people. Those who liked Cephas mostly came from elsewhere, such as Syria or Palestine. Paul's group tended to be poor people and slaves. Each faction was coming from a different cultural direction and using theology to set itself apart from the others. Each party thought it had a corner on righteousness. It had the answers. It was superior.

The great thing about having all the answers is that if my way is the only way, the correct way, the chosen way, and yours is not, then I do not have to deal with you. I do not have to make myself uncomfortable by allowing your customs to interfere with my customs. Or with any part of my life, for that matter. I might even be so right that I can feel justified in running you out of town.

No wonder Paul has to come down so hard on his church. He has to help them find the common ground that allows them to be different while doing God's work together. And that would be resurrection; the hope that we all can expect to enter a better life at the end. Together. I guess that's a point worth belaboring.

Emily Ingalls

Sunday, December 5, 2004

Collect 159 or 211
Psalm 72
Isaiah 11:1-10
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

Death is often seen as the opposite of life, but it can really be seen as life itself, triumphant, reaching its full end. So why in Advent would one consider death? Aren't we to focus on birth, on life, on the coming of Jesus? It's a time of excitement and longing, not a time of gloom and lament. It's the nativity, not the passion.

But it was Jesus' very life that guaranteed him an early and violent death. He challenged social boundaries, he ate with the unacceptable, he spoke out and defied class inequality. He dismissed exclusion and celebrated inclusion.

As I ponder the incarnation, the very love of God manifest in the birth and life of Jesus, I hope and pray that this will really happen in me. Not only to pray, "O come, O come, Immanuel..." but to live it. I pray to see and move beyond my own boundaries, to strive for peace and justice in all circles of my life. I hope to welcome the incarnation into my heart and to allow it to be manifest in my life.

Vincent Black

Monday, December 6, 2004

Psalm 78:3-7 or 145:8-13
I John 4:7-14
Mark 10:13-16

What is Advent about? Today's lessons subtly reveal that it is about stories, miracles, traditions, treasures, discoveries and observing the little things.

I will be the first to admit that I love Advent and Christmas. The material world has taken over and the season comes earlier every year but I love an outing to Breezewood Gardens in Chagrin Falls for their open house to see all the trees and the perfect Snow Village. I love watching the neighborhood come to life with lights and decorations. Even the Starbucks cardboard sleeves make me smile with sayings like "Now is the time for small treasures" and "Now is the time for dancing hearts".

What better place to find gentle love than through the eyes of a child? Mark's gospel reminds us that the Kingdom belongs to little children and in them do we put our hope for the future. I occasionally have the honor of serving as a chalice bearer at the nine o'clock Celebration Eucharist. Many children attend this service. There is so much joy and wonder as they dip the tiny pieces of bread into the cup of wine. And there is much observation going on. They stop, look and listen. They look at me, they look up at Mom or Dad, they look at the wine. They look at what they are doing. They look to make sure they did a good job. And then they smile. The kingdom of heaven is in those moments on both sides of the cup.

The psalm of David and the epistle remind us that God is merciful, tenderhearted, slow to anger, loving and kind. These characteristics embrace all of the creatures he has made. As long as we love one another, God will live in us and his love will be complete in us. We are shareholders of that spirit.

What is Advent about? The lessons for today reveal that it is about how we should live our lives daily, loving one another, like children in God's Kingdom.

Karla Rivers

Tuesday, December 7, 2004

Psalm 27:5-11 or 33:1-5, 20-21
Ecclesiasticus 2:7-11, 16-18
Luke 12:35-37, 42-44

Advent is a pregnancy. It is full of waiting, of hope and of fear. When I was expecting our first child, I went to pre-natal classes to learn what to expect when the big day came. But what happens after the big day? What of today, when that child is ten years old? What of tomorrow?

Advent is full of hope, but the counterpoint to hope is fear because hope raises possibilities. With possibilities come uncertainty, the prospect of change, and the prospect that we ourselves may be called upon to bring about the change, to bring about the fulfillment of those possibilities. The Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," contains the lines, "The hopes and fears of all the years/ Are met in thee tonight." The arrival of the Messiah, hoped for through centuries is also to be feared. What possibilities will he open up? How will we be called to help his kingdom come into being? During Advent, while we hope for Christmas, we fear the day after. What challenges will the New Year bring? What changes are we challenged to help bring about within this New Year? Advent, like Lent, is a season of loin girding. We meditate, we pray, we gather the strength and resolve which God grants us so that when the call comes, we faithful servants may be ready, able and excited to play our part.

Rosalind Hughes

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

Psalm 103-1-10
Isaiah 40:25-31
Matthew 11:28-30

Wait for God without anxiety in spite of the political trauma of our times. I know that there will be political and social justice which is guided by wisdom and obedience to a power larger than any I have witnessed on earth.

There will be no crisis of faith. As long as I trust and believe, my strength to spread the good news will always be there. If I should somehow falter, his unconditional love will allow me to step back on the path and walk in the light of truth.

Sammy Catania

Thursday, December 9, 2004

Psalm 145:1-4, 8-13
Isaiah 41:13-20
Matthew 11:7-15

Today's excerpts surround the idea of God's promise of love and compassion.

The psalmist praises God in song, grounded in the promise that the time will come when it will be obvious to all people, the awesome goodness that is God. Consider phrases like "God's greatness is unsearchable," "all your faithful shall bless you," and "they shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom."

Isaiah approaches the promise in God's voice: promising to help the people live off the land, providing for the poor and needy, that all may see and know that "the hand of the Lord has done this."

The language in these passages is promissory. In reality, it is not always evident that God's goodness prevails. We find ourselves searching for signs of God's greatness, looking for proof that God works in the world, that God's love and compassion for all really endure.

Both passages promise what Walter Bruggemann calls "radical hope." I understand this to be the hope that speaks of a new reality: where the principles of God's love and compassion truly are unsearchable because we all participate directly in it. We yearn for goodness and compassion to abound, but often we forget our primary role in it. God constantly calls us to approach not only EVERYTHING that we do in the spirit of love and compassion, but EVERYONE as well, even those who appear clueless in the love and compassion department.

Jesus suggests that the reason people went out to see John was this desire for love and compassion: a yearning for radical hope. And he maintains that it's there to be heard… to be discovered and acted on. But in reality we're not waiting for God. God is WAITING FOR US to act…to really live into the promise of love and compassion.

Kurt Wiesner

Friday, December 10, 2004

Psalm 1
Isaiah 48:17-19
Matthew 11:16-19

Psalm 1 and Isaiah 48 both display what biblical scholar Marcus Borg calls "conventional wisdom." Conventional, because it is typical of what passes for common knowledge in most times and most places in human history. It is what most people have assumed to be the way things are or at least how they ought to be. We all know how this kind of thinking runs: "the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps. 1:6). And "O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea" (Is. 48:18). In other words, righteous people will inevitably prosper and the unrighteous will always come to ruin. The trouble with such conventional wisdom is that, more often than not, it happens not to be true!

Borg suggests that Jesus of Nazareth taught a subversive, "alternative wisdom." This kind of wisdom does not reassure listeners with comfortable platitudes, but rather unsettles and provokes. This is exactly what happens in Matthew 11:16-19. Jesus aligns himself with his one-time mentor, John the Baptist. As different as their styles were, both suffered ridicule and rejection. Jesus, ever the master of metaphor, likens John to a funeral and himself to a wedding banquet. But many of the people in Jesus' day (and ours?) refuse to play either of the games. John is too dour and too sour; Jesus is too reckless, too radical, too free in his associations. So people stayed on the sidelines. In just a few verbal strokes, Jesus has painted a picture infinitely more complicated than "the righteous will prosper; the wicked will perish" perspective of the other two passages. Jesus jostles us out of comfortable habits of thought, inviting us to think otherwise.

Bob Fowler

Saturday, December 11, 2004

Psalm 80:1-3, 14-18
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-11
Matthew 17:9-13

Riding sultry Skies in heaviness,
Everpresent ShrillCry of aloneness,
She even watches her own Shadow tremble,
Fleeting Moment...LifePulse...Senses rounded...
FlutterTouch...complete...and Murmurs sounded.

Lovely Lady of the Sea,
What Heart Blessings do you bring for me…
From the depths of cold NightStream
Echoed through your Word...LifeDream?

In each waking DayEmbrace
Do you see Love's caring face...
Floating on its own WaveCrest,
With full UniverseEmbrace still blessed?
Is it Understanding with proud Brow proclaimed...
Or compassion on EarthSoil so named,
When the need for Light through broken Wave
Screams its echoes through the darkest Cave?

Tell me, Lovely Lady of the Sea,
How is Joy…SweetSong to be,
When GodForce in ebbing CircleTide
Must await each Wave to ride?

In the folds of Underworld,
Deep within the Mazes curled
Lies a sparkling Light of Gold
Waking from Past….hideous Hold.

Guided gently through TrialRun
Until all InitiationDeed is done,
Peeling LayerCrust away
And remains of Pain Decay.

Golden Hues spread new LightWings,
From within Earth celebrates and sings.
Victory takes hold of bondaged past….
Heart...SoulTreasure...is awake at last.

Portals locked with Fear at Bay,
To LoveWarmth make open way,
And the glowing Movement from within
Echoes that another Journey does begin.

Olena Jatsyshyn

Sunday, December 12, 2004

Collect 160 or 212
Psalm 146
Isaiah 35:1-10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

I am writing this early in November. Technically it's not necessarily about Advent. But Advent is about new beginnings, so I offer this to you, the reader.

It's exactly two weeks since election day. I've been a little depressed. Like a lot of people, I took this election personally. Then I read the Advent readings for Dec. 12. Sometimes it's hard to find a connection between the readings for a particular day but these just seem to fit together and the message is right on target.

The psalmist reminds us, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish." Whether your candidate or issue won or lost, none of this is permanent.

Isaiah tells us, "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, do not fear!" Thanks Isaiah, I needed that.

Then we have the reading in Matthew. John the Baptist is in jail. His followers are worried. (I can relate – post election depression anyone?) What Jesus tells them is, 'Hey it's okay. People are still being healed, miracles are still happening. The work of God's Kingdom continues. And you know what? It doesn't matter what or who you expect your leader to be because ultimately that is God's job.'

Finally we have James, who tells us to be patient until the coming of the Lord and not to grumble against one another. There are some Bush supporters who will be added back to my prayer list.

So let's look at this as a time to begin anew, because God is our leader. His Kingdom is where our citizenship rests and we are all in this together.

Toni Ponzo

Monday, December 13, 2004

Psalm 25:3-8
Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a
Matthew 21:23-27

I am supposed to be meditating on the readings for this date but a recent conversation comes to mind instead. Someone told me she believes that everyone who repents and believes in Jesus will be saved but when we get to heaven we will have greater or lesser rewards based on our deeds while alive. Is this the Good News of Advent? That we can all be worthy if we do the "right" thing but some of us will be more worthy than others? Seems like the same ol' same ol' to me.

I'm thinking about Advent. What we are awaiting is the birth of a baby. Babies are new beings. They have a clean slate: no past hurts or offenses, no baggage. I don't think it is chance or happenstance that we celebrate the Messiah first as a baby. This is how we all begin, clean and new, without having to do anything except be born. It's how we all will be again. Clean and new. No degrees of clean or levels of brightness. Nothing to do to earn it but just to be. Like a baby.

Could be that's the Good News.

Toni Ponzo

Tuesday, December 14, 2004

Psalm 34:1-8
Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13
Matthew 21:28-32

"Which of my two sons did the father's will?" Jesus asks in today's lesson. " The one who refused to do it, but changed his mind, or the one who agreed, but did not act?" Jesus was confronting those who challenged his authority to teach. And his authority came from his deep relationship with God, cultivated by love, time and attention. He spoke of justice and mercy, healing and compassion, and bringing the reign of God's peace into the present moment. He lived what he spoke. Those who challenged him were challenged by him for inconsistancy of words and deeds.

Today's gospel reminds me of a T-shirt message I saw: *Stress- When my head says 'no' but my mouth says 'yes'*. Advent is the season of alert waiting and watching for God's new life, new peace, to appear. I often hope that means quiet and calm in order to pay attention, but Advent is full of activity, calling for time and effort. There is little quiet time. Where is the peace? I'm challenged to be conscious of how I make my decisions and spend my energy.

Jesus issued a human and faith challenge I take to heart. I want to be more intentional about how I spend my time and be aware when my choices express my deepest values. My watching and waiting this season will include noticing how God is inviting me to deeper authenticity. New life appears in subtle moments, when I can catch myself choosing to cram in the trivial and ignore the essential, to say one thing but do another for convenience or approval. Stress! Our Advent hope encourages me to notice the choice points, pause to remember my true desires, and ask God's help to act on them. And carve out the quiet moments I need. New life unfolds in and around me then. Transfrmation comes, bit by bit, piece by Peace.

Nancy Rich

Wednesday, December 15, 2004

Psalm 85:8-13
Isaiah 45:5-8 (9-17) 18-25
Luke 7:19-23

This story begins with a man and a woman who, though happily married for many years, have no children. In fact, they are the only childless couple in their village. "What a shame that you have no children," a neighbor remarks to the husband. "This is bad."

"Maybe so," the man replies.

Soon after, to everyone's surprise, the woman becomes pregnant and ultimately delivers a baby boy. "You're blessed with a son," says the neighbor. "This is good."

"Maybe so," answers the man.

The boy thrives but the stress of childbearing is too great for his mother. She falls ill and dies. "What a tragedy! Now you have a young child and no wife," says the neighbor. "This is bad."

"Maybe so," says the man.

The head of the village, seeing the sorrow of the man and wishing to ease his grief, gives him the best gift he has to offer: the most beautiful horse in his herd. "You're so lucky. You own the finest animal in the village," says the neighbor. "This is good."

"Maybe so," replies the man.

The son grows to be the smartest, strongest boy in the village. One afternoon, as the youth is out riding with his friends, a snake startles the horse. In its fright, the animal rears and stumbles onto some rocks, throwing the boy. Both are seriously injured, the horse so much so that he has to be put down. "It's a shame to lose such a fine animal, but at least your son is alive," the neighbor says. "This is good ."

"Maybe so," says the man. Although the boy does not die in the accident, it leaves him lame, his right leg twisted. "Your son can no longer run or ride with the other boys," says the neighbor. "This is bad."

"Maybe so," the man answers.

Then the governor's guard storms the village. All the young men in the village are dragged off to serve in the emperor's army, all to die on a faraway battlefield, all never to be seen again. All, that is, but this man's son.

Jan C. Snow

Thursday, December 16, 2004

Psalm 30
Isaiah 54:1-10
Luke 7:24-30

The nights are long and the cold grows sharper. We have entered that unsettling time of year when the demands and desires of the world swirl about us unmercifully just as our innermost selves crave silence, withdrawal and meditation. It is quite a task to set aside the feverish "business" of the season. We readily understand the anguished plea of the old Finnish song, "Lost in the night do the people yet languish, longing for morning the darkness to vanquish . . .. Will not day come soon?"

During this time of watching and waiting, today's readings offer comfort and encouragement. And we need this help because our Advent work is very important. We are preparing to proclaim life in a bleak season of death, to kindle light at the dark heart of winter.

The psalmist praises God for restoring him to health after sickness brought him to edge of the grave: "You changed my mourning into dancing; you took off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness . . .." Isaiah offers further courage. "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed." And, perhaps best of all, the text from Luke recalls the ancient exhortation to prepare the way of the Lord. That is exactly what we are doing here in the dark - waiting for a baby and expecting a miracle.

Soon, soon, the old song promises. He is coming soon.

Judy Drotleff

Friday, December 17, 2004

Psalm 72:1-8
Genesis 49:2, 8-10
Matthew 1:1-7, 17

> *O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, You govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.*

Psalm 72 is considered to be a royal psalm, perhaps even having been used at a coronation. Some have considered it to be a messianic psalm, referring to the One whose birth we will soon celebrate once again.

As we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, I think these words from Psalm 72 certainly make us think of the life and ministry of Jesus: "May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor." (Psalm 72: 2-4, NRSV).

This was the work of the One on whose coming we meditate during Advent: to defend the poor, deliver the needy and to crush oppression. We are called during this Advent season 2004 to not just meditate on these things, but to "go and do likewise."

One of the things that attracted me to Trinity Cathedral was its ministry to the poor and the deep concern for issues of justice. How will you and I seek to fulfill that ministry in the Cathedral and in our personal lives? I challenge myself - and you - to meditate, to pray, and then, to act - that we might be Christ to those who need him so much. A blessed Advent to you and yours!

Clint Anderson

Saturday, December 18, 2004

Psalm 72:11-18
Jeremiah 23:5-8
Matthew 1:18-25

> *O Adonai, O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, Who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, Who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain, Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.*

God is alive in my heart; there is nothing to fear. I need to put a sticker on my memory that says, "When love replaces fear as the foundation of my life, then fear has no foundation and my life is built on love."

While the psalm and the reading from Jeremiah speak of God's mighty strength and power, the passage from Matthew reminds me that the opportunity to connect to God's love does not always show itself through might. In fact, I often reconnect to God through people and situations normally ignored by the mighty and powerful: a baby, a scared young woman, an embarrassed and confused man struggling to do the right thing, a simple statement seen at 65 mph -"Jesus Saves." These reminders and many others are always there, an ever-present invitation for reconciliation.

Thank you, God, for patiently and lovingly welcoming me back into your love. Thank you for daily opportunities to experience hope. Thank you for Jesus who assures me that hope, goodness and peace will ALWAYS overcome despair, fear and pain so that with a joyful voice I can say with conviction, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things." Amen.

Karen Gillooly

Sunday, December 19, 2004

Collect 160 or 212
Psalm 24
Isaiah 7:10-17
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

> *O Flower of Jesse's stem, You have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; Kings stand silent in your presence; The nations bow down before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.*

Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Toni Morrison wrote a book a few years ago. You may remember it. The first line is, "They killed the white girl first." I, along with a lot of other people, had a difficult time understanding and following the story. One of the problems is that, in Morrison's novel, time does not progress in a straight line. At any given moment the characters might be in the past, present or future and you can not be sure which.

Ms. Morrison was asked why she wrote in this way. What did it mean? Her reply was that people do not experience time in a linear fashion and can in fact be concurrently experiencing past, present and future. WHAT?!

Now, years later, I contemplate Advent and I begin to understand. God's entry into the human condition is simultaneously about all that was, is and is yet to be. The eternal, timeless God entered into finite human time and forever changed it.

Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God that it is here now and also not yet. When he spoke about it in parables he said, "the kingdom is like…" It is here now. When he taught his followers how to pray, he prayed for "thy kingdom come." It is not yet. As we move through this Advent season and into the coming new year, we do so as members of that Kingdom. Whenever and however we worship God, we do so from a perspective outside of linear time. Worship, whether it is reading scripture, participating in the Eucharist or laboring in God's vineyard, is always about simultaneously remembering the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught about it in the past, participating in it in the present and creating it for the future.

World without end. Amen.

Toni Ponzo

Monday, December 20, 2004

Psalm 24
Isaiah 7:10-14
Luke 1:26-38

O Key of David, O royal power of Israel, Controlling at your will the gate of heaven; Come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death; And lead your captive people into freedom.

The price of the Lord's blessing sometimes seems awfully high. Daily I face temptations to dirty my hands and/or heart. It might be the person who races up behind me on the highway, not slowing down until right at my back bumper and causing me to tense with the memory of one who didn't stop. It might be the person who comes across as rude, condescending or manipulative. It might be any number of things. And as for pledging my soul to that which is good and true, I sometimes see a lot of shades of gray, many truths. It isn't always easy to sort through them and find THE truth, God's truth. I've gotten better at figuring it out with age but I still have to be attentive.

Apparently Mary got it right, and at a very young age. How I admire that and at the same time wonder how she did it. How did she deal with a society that limited her options and saw her as less than she could be without giving in to resignation, resentment and other destructive feelings? How did she keep her heart focused on what is true while dealing with the pains of her life, including the pain of the cross? How did she manage to stay true to God, to say "yes" regardless of what was happening all around her?

I try to learn from Mary. And though I often fall short, I strive always to do my best and to say "yes" even when it scares me. In the end, God will judge me in all my imperfection, so I measure myself by my efforts and growth.

Sherry Watts

Tuesday, December 21, 2004

Collect 185 or 237
Psalm 126
Habakkuk 2:1-4
Hebrews 10:35-11:1
John 20:24-29

> *O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

While we are waiting for the beginning of Jesus' story, Thomas is at the other end of it. He is in a dark place of loneliness and depression after Jesus' death. Even when his friends come to tell him the good news that Jesus has returned, Thomas will not believe them without having proof. How many of us are in our own kind of darkness right now, and find it hard to believe that Christmas is just around the corner? We want to believe that we will be touched by that baby lying in the manger, but in our stressful lives that is hard to do. Stuck in our own dark places, it is easier to say, "Unless I can smell the animals, watch the star rise, and hear the shepherds sing, I will not believe."

I think this story has two messages for us. First of all, Jesus accepts that Thomas has been doubting and gives him the proof he needs. When we are in our dark places and find it hardest to believe, I think Jesus will come and give us the help we need, too. It might not be as concrete as being able to touch Jesus wounds, but it will be enough for us to overcome our doubts. Secondly, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." I think that, even though Jesus will come to us when we are in doubt, he is also telling us to try hard to believe without proof.

During this Advent season, let us take some time to work on our belief in the Christmas story. As we struggle with what we believe, Jesus will be nearby and will bless both our doubts and our beliefs.

Lisa Carter

Wednesday, December 22, 2004

Canticle 9 (BCP p. 86; Isaiah 12: 2-6)
Psalm 113 or 122
1 Samuel 1:19-28
Luke 1:46-56.

> *O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O keystone of the mighty arch of humanity, Come and save the creatures you have fashioned from the dust.*

With only a few days remaining until Christmas, today's readings continue the narrative of the events leading up to Christ's birth. The readings begin with the First Song of Isaiah in which the prophet sings a short song of praise for God's deliverance from the many years of prior conflict and exile. "Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid." The psalms are short hymns of praise probably sung while on the journey to Jerusalem. The selection from 1 Samuel tells the story of how the 11th century BC prophet Samuel was conceived by his mother Hannah as a result of her fervent prayers to God, and is dedicated to the service of the Lord.

But don't stop there. Read aloud the Song of Hannah that follows immediately (1 Sam 2: 1-10). Hannah prayed and said, "The Lord has filled my heart with joy. How happy I am because of what he has done." Now, as we look backward in history, we can see how this story of Hannah anticipated the story of the Virgin Mary, and Mary's great song of praise, the Magnificat, (Luke 1: 46-56): "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior." Mary's song is a mosaic of Old Testament quotations and allusions that anticipate the coming of Jesus, the new king, and is remarkably parallel to Hannah's song. Both of these canticles see the actions of God as his way of overthrowing proud human expectations and exalting the lowly. Both of these songs set the stage for the coming of Jesus a few days from now.

Ambrose A. Clegg

Thursday, December 23, 2004

Psalm 25:1-14
Malachi 3:1-5
Luke 1:57-66

> *O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of all the nations, Savior of all people, Come and set us free, Lord, our God.*

We come to Advent with hindsight. Psalm 25 reminds us that our lives lack the perspective of history. It is the song that could have been applied to Mary, a peasant girl, and Joseph, her betrothed, an older man. The residents of Bethlehem undoubtedly know that Joseph has never consummated the relationship. Yet she is pregnant.

The gossips of Bethlehem saw a teenage girl "in trouble," and an older, laboring man marrying her despite her loss of bride value. Some may have seen him as a fool, others as noble. Unknowingly, what they were witnessing was a man of faith, trusting in God as he walked with his pregnant fiancée into an unknown life.

The psalm begins "I offer you my heart, Lord God, and I trust you." This is one of the most important lessons of Advent. Mary and Joseph could not look back on their unborn son's life and death, only forward. Whatever they were enduring for the audacity of their relationship, their calm came from giving their hearts and trust to God.

The psalm, applied to the season, reminds us that we, too, must offer our hearts and trust God, no matter what our lives bring. Blessed or in pain, rich or poor, sick or healthy, we must get through each moment like a child in a thunderstorm who, though terrified, knows that by holding a parent's hand, somehow all will be well.

Joseph trusted God when he accepted the pregnant Mary as his betrothed. Mary trusted God knowing how hard it might be for Joseph to face the scorn of other men who would not have married her. Each of us, in every generation and in all walks of life, must learn to love and trust God in the moment, without knowledge of so much as the next minute of our existence.

Ted Schwarz

Friday, December 24, 2004

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-29
II Samuel 7:1-16
Luke 1:67-69

Darkness is the misinterpreted word
Its horn held by the masses that blindly follow
Enlightenment must include love and justice from the edge
Else broken words, shattered truths can ring hollow

Fred Blake

Christmas Services at Trinity Cathedral

December 24th- Christmas Eve

5:00 pm Eucharist & Christmas Pageant

10:30 pm Prelude

Brandenburg Concert No. 5, J. S. Bach
Marienlieder, Johannes Brahms

11:00 pm Midnight Choral Eucharist

Christmas Day, Gustav Holst

December 25th-Christmas day

10:00 am Eucharist with Carols