

# Devotions for the Season of Advent

## St. Peter's Episcopal Church



Written by St. Peter's Parishioners, Clergy & Lay Staff

# ***SPECIAL SERVICES IN ADVENT***

## **ADVENT LESSONS & CAROLS: DECEMBER 14**

A CHORAL SERVICE OF MUSIC AND READINGS PRECEDED BY  
ADVENT MUSIC PERFORMED ON THE ORGAN

5:00 PM

## **BLUE CHRISTMAS: DECEMBER 17**

A SERVICE FOR THOSE SEEKING SOLACE MORE THAN CELEBRATION

5:30 PM Holy Eucharist

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# ***CHRISTMAS SERVICES***

## **CHRISTMAS EVE: DECEMBER 24**

4:00 PM Christmas Pageant & Holy Eucharist

OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT, LED BY THE CHILDREN OF  
ST. PETER'S

6:00 PM Holy Eucharist

A TRADITIONAL SERVICE OF MUSIC AND CAROLS

9:00 PM Holy Eucharist

AN INTIMATE AND FESTIVE GATHERING

## **CHRISTMAS DAY: DECEMBER 25**

10:00 AM Holy Eucharist

A JOYFUL AND QUIET CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR

# ***SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30***

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Amos 1:1-5; 13-2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Luke 21:5-9

In between the darkness and light, in between the visitations and dwellings, the season of Advent is trying to teach us something. To learn the lesson of Advent, we must take to heart the way the scriptures for today are saying we should prepare to receive it: We must be watching, we must be waiting, we must be discerning, and we must be listening.

The Lord prophesied that the temple of Jerusalem would be thrown down; Paul sees how we are the new temple, and we are told to build each other up. Do not get me wrong – I love beautiful churches and temples. And we give the temple to the Lord in our best effort to glorify God. However, the Lord gives himself to us, and therefore glorifies us. So we glorify God best when we live our lives trying to embody what beauty conveys. Spacious sacred spaces that we construct are dear, and good, but the only thing that can exist forever is the depth of the love of God dwelling within us, bearing it into those places that are broken and in need of restoration. In the words of Meister Eckhart: “What does it avail me that birth is always happening, if it does not happen in me?”

So watch. Wait. Discern. Listen. And as we prepare to celebrate one arrival while we wait for the consummation of the next, in the endurance of doing those things you will gain your souls.

***-The Reverend Dr. Nathan Haydon***

# ***MONDAY, DECEMBER 1***

Amos 2:6-16; 2 Peter 1:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11

The gospel reading for today is the story of Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem a week before His crucifixion. At first glance, this may seem like a strange reading for the start of Advent. After all, this event occurs at the very end of Jesus' life, and right now we are getting ready to celebrate His birth.

The reason this passage is read at Advent is found in verses 4-5.

*This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,  
'Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*

These verses are taken from Zechariah 9:9 which is an Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah. With His actions, Jesus was fulfilling this prophecy.

There are anywhere from 300 to 500 prophecies in the Old Testament which point directly to Jesus as the Messiah. In Advent, we read several of these prophecies. Yet most people in Israel during the time of Jesus' life missed their long-awaited Messiah. Even those in the crowd that day only said that Jesus was a prophet.

We are entering a very busy time of year for most people. Christmas is a whirlwind of activity, presents, parties, decorations and so much more. But in all the hustle and bustle are we missing something? Do we also miss our Messiah? This Advent, make time to find Jesus.

***-Sandy Knight***

# ***TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2***

Amos 3:1-11; 2 Peter 1:12-21; Matthew 21:12-22

My late mother, a talented church organist, began practicing Christmas music with her choir in early October of every year. She spent hours at the baby grand piano in our living room practicing the carols of Advent when autumn leaves had barely started to change color. My young brother and I found this hilariously funny and shrieked, "Mom, it's too EARLY for Christmas!" Mom smiled and replied, "Actually, it's not too early; I have to refresh my memory so I can play all the right notes. Advent is a season of preparation, and I'm preparing myself to deliver God's message through music." My mother cheerfully practiced and practiced until the notes were ingrained in her memory; her fingers flew over the keys without her ever glancing at the sheet music.

In 2 Peter 1:12-21, Peter uses the words "remind", "refresh your memory," and "remember" to implore his colleagues to remember God's prophecy that Jesus Christ is coming. He states very clearly that the prophecy does not come from man but directly from God, making us "eyewitnesses of His majesty." What an incredible blessing to be an eyewitness to a miracle, yet how quickly, in the secular world of sparkly tinsel and blinking lights, do we forget the true meaning of Christmas. I learned a lot from watching my mother diligently practice her music in order to be ready for Advent. God calls us all to consciously refresh our memory and willingly ready our hearts for the coming of our Lord and Savior.

Dear Lord, remind us that just as a choir prepares its music, we must prepare our hearts daily in anticipation of Christmas. Fill our hearts with hope, peace, joy, and love so that our lives are a reflection of your goodness and grace.

Amen.

***-Noelle Miles***

# ***WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3***

Amos 3:12-4:5; 2 Peter 3:1-10; Matthew 21:23-32

When a “Check Engine” light comes on my car, I tell myself it’s an automated warning that just needs to be reset by a mechanic. I will take care of it when I have more time. No harm! At some point, the light is on for so long, I begin to stop noticing it.

In Amos, we hear the ache in God’s voice: “Yet you did not return to me.” The prophet speaks to a people who have grown comfortable and distracted, forgetting the God who delivered them. And in 2 Peter, we are reminded that God’s seeming delay is not neglect but love. “The Lord is not slow... but is patient with you.” Every moment of waiting is space for renewal, for repentance, for readiness. God’s “Check Engine” warnings are not harsh punishments but acts of mercy — wake-up calls meant to stir His people back into communion.

In Matthew, Jesus tells of two sons — one who says “no” but goes, and another who says “yes” but never goes. It’s a simple, but piercing story. Someone promises to pray for a friend, but never gets around to it; while another quietly shows up with a meal or a ride. Which one did the will of the Father?

Our faith is not measured by what we say, but by what we do. Real repentance looks like taking a different course of action, real hope looks like readiness and anticipation, and real love shows itself in how we live and treat others. Advent reminds us that our “yes” to God must be embodied in compassion to those around us.

Together, these passages remind us that God is always calling, waiting, and transforming. Advent invites us to answer that call — to wake up, turn back, and live out our faith in ways that bear fruit.

***-John Auble***

# ***THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4***

Amos 4:6-13; 2 Peter 3:11-18; Matthew 21:33-46

The name Israel means “to wrestle with God.” God gave this name to Jacob after he wrestled with God all night in the desert. I’ve always been fascinated with the notion that to be part of the people of God, to be in relationship with God, means wrestling with God. Rather than walking pastorally side by side with Jesus, the Bible depicts faithful relationship with God as fully engaged, all-out skirmishing. That may not sound comforting, but it’s a much more accurate depiction of true faith.

I wrestle with these passages from Amos and Matthew. Amos’ depiction of God and Jesus’ parable of the landowner describe God with very human emotions. God is annoyed with his people. God is angry and frustrated that despite God’s many attempts to be in communion with the people, they ignore God (in Amos) and beat God’s representatives and cast them away (in Matthew). This causes God to utter the famous phrase, “Prepare to meet your Maker!” Not very reassuring. On one hand, Christ proclaims that God is infinitely forgiving and reassures us there is no sin greater than God’s power to love. On the other hand, passages like these remind us that God is not passive. God is very much active in our world and in our lives. God wants to be engaged with us. There is no setting or situation in which God is not present.

Advent is a season of returning from complacency and casual belief to faithful engagement with God. When we become complacent, we tend to see God as a passive presence in our life. God becomes a genie in a bottle to grant our occasional wish or a gentle advisor to guide us when convenient. The true God is impatient to be in relationship so that we may be fully open to the abundant life only God can offer. In this season of Advent, may we wake from complacency and celebrate that the One who, “forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth” calls us into a relationship of joy and peace.

***-The Reverend Luke Jernagan***

# ***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5***

Amos 5:1-17; Jude 1-16; Matthew 22:1-14

What does it mean to be radically inclusive? What might such inclusivity reveal about the in-breaking of God into the world --a mystery Advent invites us to ponder anew each year?

In Jesus' parable of the Wedding Banquet, we glimpse part of the answer. Like the King, many of us tend to invite only a narrow set of people into our circle. Think of an upcoming holiday party. If I am being honest, the names included are inner circle or aspirational friends. We curate connections to enhance our life, and project out to the world who we attempt to be. But flip to another perspective in the story and I see myself again. Too often, like the people of Israel this parable seems to reference, I sit on the sideline when called into the messy participatory space of transformation.

But the story does not end here; the second invitation is refreshingly much more radical. "Go therefore to the main roads, and invite everyone you find." Throw open the doors, we are encouraged. Break bread with those with whom you profoundly disagree. Walk hand in hand with the sickly. Be seen loving the outcast. This is the person I want to be, even while I too often fall short. So why does the story not end here? Why does it have to go forward with a tale of the King throwing the man without the wedding garment into the darkness? Scholars often highlight the symbolic role of the wedding garment as a sign of the transformed life. In an individual's failure to don it, might they be showing their failure to be formed? If this is the case, I also see myself here. How often I partly participate in a gift of life that offers a seed of potential transformation -- my role as spouse, parent, or friend, for example--- and thus fail to allow the relationship to work its power? Across multiple parts of this story, I see myself. As inviter, I include those I want in my inner circle. As invited, fear keeps me from joining the banquet. And as guest, bringing a posture of partial participation, and thus lacking transformation as a result.

It is nearly impossible to encounter Jesus in this Gospel and not see yourself at some point in the text. All of us need transformation, we are reminded. And yet, as a kind of sprout of grace, this Advent text also reminds us that the opportunities are always right in front of us. The door opens afresh. The call to join is always robust. May we all find space this holiday to hear a new call to the wedding feast, and to once again participate in the inclusive in-breaking of God into our world, hungry for hospitality.

***-Peter Boumgarden***



# ***SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6***

Amos 5:18-27; Jude 17-25; Matthew 22:15-22

If you haven't seen *Soul on Fire*, the movie about John O'Leary, it's well worth your time. You may already know his remarkable story from his book *On Fire* or from hearing him speak. The film beautifully captures the spirit of St. Louis and makes me proud to call this city home.

Mercy Hospital plays a central role in saving John's life, alongside Jack Buck, the Cardinals, neighbors, friends, family, a scout leader, and his piano teacher—all of whom helped bring God's kingdom of love, healing, and hope to one little boy.

When you hear the phrase "the day of the Lord," what comes to mind? In Amos' time—over 700 years before Christ—the people of Israel and Judah longed for God to appear and fight for them, remembering past deliverance and expecting divine protection. We, too, may imagine that day as a moment when good triumphs over evil and God's light fills the world.

But Amos warned that the "day of the Lord" would be darkness, not light, because God is not impressed by worship, music, or offerings when injustice thrives. God's judgment falls on societies marked by conflict, hatred, greed, and neglect of the poor. What God truly desires is sincerity, integrity, and a faith that "lets justice roll down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Catherine McAuley embodied that faith. Born in Dublin in 1778, she inherited great wealth and used it to build a home for homeless women and children. Her compassion grew into the Sisters of Mercy, who cared for the poor, the sick, and the uneducated. At her death in 1841, there were 100 Sisters and 10 foundations.

From her vision came Mercy Hospitals, including our own in St. Louis—where a burned little boy named John O'Leary once experienced not only the power of medicine but also the miracles of mercy and love.

Catherine McAuley lived so that justice could roll like a river—and her blessings still flow today, even here in our city.

***-Emily Rosencrans***

# ***SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7***

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Amos 6:1-14; Thessalonians. 1:5-12; Luke 1:57-68

There is a background to Luke's story of Zechariah that we hear in these verses. Months before, the angel Gabriel had appeared to the old priest as he was performing his duties, all alone in the dark temple (I imagine looking up to see a terrifyingly beautiful stranger standing beside me, his presence illuminating the darkness. I would doubt my own eyes. If I had been Zechariah, it would have turned my spit to dust and stopped my heart cold.).

The angel made a bewildering declaration: Zechariah and his equally old wife would conceive their first child (I am 75; it isn't hard to imagine the fear howling in my ears at that point, to imagine my reason cracking into shards like an old pot.). It is no wonder that doubt pounced onto Zechariah's tongue, that he demanded explanation from the apparition.

For his doubt – doubt that resonates profoundly with me – the angel struck him dumb. The old priest would not regain his speech during all the long months of his wife's pregnancy. Not until eight days after the impossible had actually come to pass, not until the child's circumcision when Zechariah wrote the infant's name, would he regain his ability to speak. All those months, he could only listen. Wait and listen. Listen and wait.

Dear Lord, if you can avoid it, please do not strike me mute, but rather teach me to seal my own lips more often. Open my eyes to recognize your messengers – and open my ears to their words, however implausible or daunting. Humble me gently. Stiffen me against fear and doubt. Help me accept my own worthiness despite all indications to the contrary. Let this Advent be the space where I learn to listen and wait, wait and listen, with patience and grace.

***-Katie Claggett***

# ***MONDAY, DECEMBER 8***

Amos 7:1-9; Revelation 1:1-8; Matthew 22:23-33

I usually end most of my days sitting outside on the deck enjoying the darkness. In the summer the crickets come out and the fireflies dance on the air. In the winter I often hear the song of our resident barn owl out on the prowl. The darkness sharpens my ears to hear the transition of the world around me. As one thing takes its rest, another begins its work.

Advent is a time of listening in the dark and in the light because God dwells at the heart of both. In our often busy lives we seldom have the time to truly listen to the sounds of God's voice speaking softly about us. In the concerto of the crickets and the opus of the owl, in the symphony of silence and the hymn of hope, God calls to us. Perhaps we may want to find the time to stop and listen. Perhaps we may need to sharpen our ears and tune our hearts to the voice of the still-speaking God whose child we await.

***-The Right Reverend Deon Johnson,  
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri***

# ***TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9***

Amos 7:10-17; Revelation 1:9-16; Matthew 22:34-46

Today's devotional is not scriptural but about devotion itself. I accepted this assignment in ignorance, having never written a devotional before nor even knowing what a devotional was. Perhaps I can offer a few guidelines.

Devotion is a personal practice of communing and deepening one's relationship with God. It is a practice of growing faith by spending time with God and bringing God into your daily life.

Devotion typically involves prayer, reading scripture, meditating and giving thanks. For the prayer portion, I suggest a personal prayer in which you praise God and acknowledge his character and glory. A good place to start is the first prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. Next, you should confess your sins and ask for God's forgiveness. God freely forgives those who ask but not to those who do not ask. After confession petition God for your own needs or intercession for the needs of others such as family and friends. Finally, the prayer should end in thanksgiving where you thank the Lord for his mercies and the blessings you have received. Thank God for his love and protection.

The scriptural references are the root of devotion and the starting point for reflection. Daily scriptural references can be found in the Lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer. Meditation and reflection focus on God's words and teaching.. What does the scripture teach us about God and how the spiritual message applies to our daily life. Some people substitute observations of nature or events of the day for their spiritual reflection. Perhaps you met God today while taking a walk.

The devotion ends with a thanksgiving or prayer. There are several thanksgiving passages in the Bible that are short. For the ending prayer, I suggest a prayer out of the Book of Common Prayer or one that you have found online. This is not a personal prayer but one of general application to the world.

I hope you found these guidelines useful in beginning your daily devotional practice.

***- John Walker***

# ***WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10***

Amos 8:1-14; Revelation 1:17-2:7; Matthew 23:1-12

When we read the letters in the New Testament, a portion of what we're reading is the early church wrestling with what it means to be a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. In Paul's letter to the Philippians we read his understanding of God's incarnation in the person of Jesus.

## **Phillipians 2:6-8**

6 "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"

No, Phillipians is not one of the texts for the Advent devotional this week. But we do hear this line from Jesus in the reading from the Gospel of Matthew: 12 "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

I want to highlight both of those texts for us today to show that what we celebrate at Christmas is not simply the birth of Jesus. We are exalting God, for God's willingness to humble God's self, and take the form of a man. Not necessarily for what God has done for us, but for the nature of who God is alone. In Advent and at Christmas we are exalting God for God's willing humility. God's willingness to walk with us. There is nothing and never will be anything greater than God, and yet, what we see in the gospels is God's willingness not only to become man, but to humbly serve those who are the least of us as well. To wash the feet of the disciples, feed the hungry, and provide care to those who needed it most.

My prayer for you this season is that you think about the place of exalting God, for who God is alone, in the rhythm of your life, and the way that God's humility is lived out through the serving of others.

***-The Reverend Zachary Rugenstone***

# ***THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11***

Amos 9:1-10; Revelation 2:8-17; Matthew 23:13-26

First, in Amos 9:1-10, Amos describes to us his vision of Israel being destroyed on a day of judgement, detailing all of the different ways that people try to escape it. Then, in Revelation 2:8-17, God has a message for two churches, instructing those of Smyrna to remain faithful forever and instructing those of Pergamum to repent their sins. And finally, in Matthew 23:13-26, Jesus condemns the Pharisees of showing their faith on the outside rather than truly believing it on the inside.

So what is the connection between these 3 readings? God is trying to tell us several things: 1, that judgement is inescapable; 2, that if you have faith in the Lord you will overcome any strife; 3, that we are not faithful if we simply show it on the outside to others, but we must truly feel it on the inside; and 4, that without repentance for our sins we shall not be saved.

This is a lot to think about all at once, but all of these things really go hand in hand. Should you have true, internal faith in the Lord, you will overcome all hardships in obstacles. As part of this faith, repent for your sins and you shall be forgiven when you reach the inevitable judgment day.

As you go out into the world, keep these things in mind as we prepare for the coming of Jesus. Make a point to reflect on your mistakes so that you may repent and apologize to Him, and ask Him for forgiveness. Remember, He wants to forgive you, he simply needs you to ask. Throughout the Advent season, open your heart to the Lord and fill it up with faith for Him. Welcome Him into your life.

***-Nate Linneman, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade***

# ***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12***

Haggai 1:1-15; Revelation 2:18-29; Matthew 23:27-39

## **The True Meaning of Advent: Preparing for the Coming of Christ**

As I reflect on the Advent season, these passages remind me that the coming of Christ is about spiritual renewal and obedience, not just celebration. In Haggai 1, God calls his people to rebuild his temple instead of focusing on their own comfort. They had become distracted by their own homes and needs, while God's house lay in ruins. This reminds me that Advent is a time to "rebuild" my heart as a dwelling place for Jesus. Just as the people of Israel were called to put God first, I am called to turn away from distractions (especially social media) and prepare a space for Christ in my life to guide me.

In Revelation 2, the church in Thyatira is praised for faith and perseverance but warned against tolerating sin. This speaks to me during Advent because it reminds me that waiting for Christ means living in faithfulness, not compromise. Jesus, whose eyes are "like blazing fire," searches hearts and minds—He sees beyond outward actions. As I prepare for Christmas, I'm reminded that Jesus was born not just to bring light into the world, but also to expose darkness and call us back to truth and holiness.

Finally, Matthew 23 shows Jesus grieving over Jerusalem's hypocrisy. His saying—"How often I have longed to gather your children together"—reveals the heart of Advent: God's deep desire to draw his people close through the gift of his only Son. The birth of Jesus is God's response to a world that turns him away. It is an invitation to return, to be gathered as a community, all under God's guidance.

These passages challenge me to see Christmas not as a season of comfort or tradition, but as a sacred reminder to repent, rebuild, and renew. Advent is not just about remembering Christ's birth—it's about preparing for His presence today.

***-Sloane Stockwell, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade***

# ***SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13***

Haggai 2:1-9; Revelation 3:1-6; John 1:9-14

Today's gospel comes from the first chapter of John (1:9-14). Verse 9 reflects the anticipation and hope of Advent.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

For us, light at this time of the year continues to wane in a literal sense as our shortest day of the year is still a few days away. At this time of the year, we attempt to mitigate the darkness by dressing up our homes with Christmas lights and holiday decorations. It is easy to lose sight of the true purpose of Advent. During Advent we look forward to and prepare for the coming of the true light – Jesus. It is Jesus who allows us to know God in a more intimate way.

The Advent wreath introduces light in a time of darkness, a welcome reminder of the light of the gospel. It illuminates our way to the Christ child in the manger, the promise of our salvation. We light candles representing the four gifts Jesus brings into our lives – hope, peace, joy and love. May we always be grateful for God's gift of Jesus, the true light, who shows us where true life resides.

**“Once in our world, a stable had something  
that was bigger than our whole world.”**

**C.S. Lewis**

***-Didi Noelker***



# ***SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14***

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Amos 9:11-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 13-17; John 5:30-47

### **Amos 9:11-15**

The key idea in Amos is that God is just and impartial and will judge not only the nations but also his own people for their life of ease and apathy amid human suffering. It's a call to embrace the true worship of God that should always lead to justice, righteousness, and loving our neighbor.

### **2 Thessalonians 2:1-3,13-17**

Paul encourages us to remain faithful, hopeful, confident, and fearless while waiting for Jesus' return and deliverance from the evil ruler, who is the man doomed to destruction. The evil ruler will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God.

### **John 5:30-47**

Jesus provides support for his own testimony. First, he cites the testimony of John the Baptist, second, he cites his miraculous signs and wonders, third, he cites the testimony of God the Father, and lastly, he cites the testimony of the Scriptures. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

So what does this mean to me?

God will judge me impartially for my life of ease and apathy amid human suffering. He is calling me to embrace a life which leads to justice, righteousness and loving my neighbor. Paul is encouraging me to remain faithful, hopeful, confident and fearless while I wait for the second coming of Christ. At this time Christ will deliver me from the evil ruler, who will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God. Jesus supports his own testimony by citing John the Baptist, his miraculous signs and wonders, the testimony of God, and the testimony of the scriptures. There is plenty of proof of who Christ is. Or, as Proverbs 3: 5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

***–Ben Park***

# ***MONDAY, DECEMBER 15***

Zechariah. 1:7-17; Revelation 3:7-13; Matthew 24:15-31

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty... remember that old game? Hiding, then hearing, "Ready or not, here I come!" How many times will we hear, "Are you ready?" in the next two weeks?

It's here—the mad dash to December 25th, that magical moment when we long for life's chaos to pause and for everything to be "just right."

We try to satisfy that longing in the holiday rush—the shopping, decorating, baking, singing—but still, we ache for something deeper: to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Sweet Baby.

Then—wham—Matthew's Gospel jolts us:

"When you see the disastrous abomination... escape to the mountains... For there will be great distress such as never was before."

This isn't about preparing for a Baby, but for Judgment. "Be ready now," says the Gospel—ready while paying bills, shopping, walking the dog. Ready to stand before the Son of Man.

It's as urgent as any call from the mall: not to get ready, but to be ready. Are we ready now—for the Son of Man coming in power and glory?

"Give us grace, O God, to be ready—to stand before you in every moment and know your power and glory. Amen."

***-The Reverend Susie Skinner***

# ***TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16***

Zechariah 2:1-13; Revelation 3:14-22; Matthew 24:32-44

There is an anxiety attached to Jesus' call to be ready, and this same Advent anxiousness is found in the Church's liturgy and music.

One Responsory begins, "Now it is time to wake out of sleep, For the night is far spent and the day is at hand."

Our prayer and song echo with calls to be alert, to watch, and wake from sleep.

"Sleepers, wake!" A voice astounds us,  
the shout of rampart guards surrounds us:  
"Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" (Philip Nicolai, Hymn 61/62)

A refrain in George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series is "the night is dark and full of terrors." And so it seems in what we sing. We rely on the rampart guards and the watchmen to keep us safe from whatever stalks us while we sleep. We stay awake all night in case a thief should try to break in.

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeing someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith. (1 Peter 5:8-9a)

Yet it is in the midst of this darkness that our eyes perceive changes in the light.

In John Bowring's hymn, "Watchman, tell us of the night" (Hymn 640), a dialogue begins with the Traveler asking for news of the night. A star of promise appears. It ascends higher. Finally, "the morning seems to dawn," but this new radiance is the arrival of the Prince of Peace.

Make us watchful and alert, O Lord our God, that when he comes, your Son Christ our Lord will not find us sleeping in sin or distracted with fears, but awake, strong in faith, active in service, and rejoicing in your praises, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***-David Sinden***

# ***WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17***

Zechariah 3:1-10; Revelation 4:1-8; Matthew 24:45-51

"You're in charge while I'm gone." You probably remember the first time you were old enough to be responsible for your house and younger siblings while your parents were away. You may chuckle to yourself today, remembering the petty tyrannies you dreamed up for anyone placed under your temporary authority. I hope, for my part, that I eventually apologized to my sister for one particularly nasty fight over whether I could tell her to set the table while I made dinner (thinking that our mom and dad had lost track of time and hadn't planned a meal); our parents were running late that evening, as it happened, because they were picking up pizza!

"Who is the faithful servant placed in charge of the household, to give their fellow servants their food at the right time?" I'm struck by the simplicity of the task. The servant placed in charge is not evaluating anyone else's work, not testing for compliance or orthodoxy, only bringing food to the table. I also notice just how little power it takes to corrupt the servant: when the owner of the house doesn't come back right away, the servant immediately believes he can do as he wishes, abusing his fellow servants and taking up a wasteful and lavish lifestyle.

In the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus talks about authority, he talks about faithful service. In Matthew 20, when James and John's mother asks him to give them high positions in the kingdom of God, Jesus answers that greatness among his followers is identified with the humblest service. Christians today live among the temptations of power, explicitly offered visions of Christian nationalism and supremacy, but the Gospel warns that these things corrupt and destroy. The task of a Christian, Jesus says, is to do ordinary work with loving care. The mark of our faithfulness and wisdom, the Gospel teaches, is the well-being of others.

***-Issac Arten***

# ***THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18***

Zechariah 4:1-14; Revelation 4:9-5:5; Matthew 25:1-13

The season we are well into celebrates an event foretold so long ago with signs, words and acts. As we approach the culmination of these prophecies, we see around us our celebrations of our season of Advent.

We revel in the joy and love and pause in wonder at the coming revelation to us of the love of God to send his only Son for our salvation.

So as we pause, let us rejoice in the love of the season and keep before us what is given for us.

And let us remain certain that all the prophecies of God will come to pass in a time we cannot predict, but we remain vigilant every day.

Let us live in the spirit of our Lord and his son Jesus and what this Advent season reveals to us.

***– Kit Baker***

# ***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19***

Zechariah 7:8-8:8; Revelation 5:6-14; Matthew 25:14-30

As I sit down to write this reflection, I can see from my window spectacular orange, red and yellow leaves on the trees. They make the most beautiful contrast to the bright blue sky. I can hardly recall a more stunning autumn. I try to take it all in as I know soon these vivid colors will wane. It gets darker and darker earlier and earlier each day. Winter quickly approaches, and we must wait for what will seem like a long time before the sun again shines into the evening, spring blooms appear, and the fun warm weather activities resume.

So...we wait. The Advent season is all about waiting. Week by week we light a candle and anticipate the joy of Christmas. We revisit stories of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus in the manger. We also ponder Christ's brief life on earth and His ultimate sacrifice for us. We wait, we reflect, and finally, we celebrate.

One of the December 19 Daily Office readings is the story of "The Worthy Lamb" from the book of Revelation. This story describes a holy scroll, handed down directly from God, clearly containing a crucial message. Unfortunately, the scroll is sealed so that no one, not even the wisest elders and prophets, can open it. Finally, after many futile attempts and plenty of angst, a Lamb, appearing to have been slaughtered, dramatically presents itself and opens the scroll.

This Lamb of course represents Jesus Christ. The Lamb comes at the end of a dark waiting period. The Lamb enlightens the world and puts an end to despair. The Lamb is celebrated in this and other stories as most powerful, wise, and glorious. The Lamb is sent especially to us from God and the reward is well worth the wait!

During this Advent season, let us take the time to pause and reflect as we wait. Let us savor the miracle of Christ's birth, life, and sacrifice for us. Let us rejoice and be thankful for the bounty that follows the wait.

***-Ann Sutter Spann***

# ***SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20***

Psalm 46; Isaiah 55:6-11; John 15:1-11

There is a common theme that ties these three lessons together. Coming as they do on the Saturday before Christmas, they make a kind of declaratory promise that sounds like the words from a hymn.

In Psalm 46:1-3, the repeated message of courage in God regardless of what happens in the world binds the believer to God. It is as though calamity may occur in order to remind us of whose we are. Regardless of fire, earthquake, or flood we yet exist by God's help. Simply put, nothing can take us from God.

This is repeated in Isaiah 55, where we read a hymn that once again speaks of the earth as a proclaimer of God's power and presence. The mountains, hills, and trees in the fields are all given human attributes: they sing and clap their hands.

In John 15, Jesus proclaims that His followers will be like trees or vines that bear ripe fruit – a particularly powerful metaphor in an arid land.

These three passages are reminders that prepare us for what is about to take place. After centuries, the promised Son of God is soon to be born and this good news cannot be contained. The whole creation shakes with joy.

***-The Reverend David Puckett***

# ***SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21***

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Genesis 3:8-15; Revelation 12:1-10; John 3:16-21

In stark contrast to our sanitized ideals of Christmas time, today's readings are a reminder that our need for a Savior is rooted in our sin, shame, and love of darkness (Genesis 3:10, John 3:19). We see that the same serpent who was there in the beginning will be there again in the end, the ever-present portent of sin, destruction, and death (Genesis 3:1, Revelation 12:3).

However, despite our fallenness, our heavenly Father seeks us in our shame (Genesis 3:9) and loves us so much that he gave his only son, not only to live for us but to die for us as well (John 3:16). As believers we must live in this tension of now and not yet; the reality that the birth of Jesus is only the beginning of our unfinished story in Him, and that the same God who sought us in the garden will redeem us in the end of days (Revelation 12:10).

In these final days before Christmas, as we rush to put the finishing touches on our celebrations, let us remember that the real finish line is yet to come. Recognizing that amidst the twinkling lights, Christmas cookies, and holiday festivities lives the promise of Christ's coming glory, the ultimate destruction of evil, and the precious gift of eternal life for those who believe in Him.

***–Katelyn Wilson***



# ***MONDAY, DECEMBER 22***

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Titus 1:1-16; Luke 1:1-25

Gabriel flits about the Daily Office as Advent reaches its culmination. Today, he visits Zechariah. Tomorrow, Mary. But no messenger comes to Elizabeth to tell her of her own miraculous conception, except her suddenly mute husband. One can only imagine his mimed explanation of Gabriel's message and his new condition!

The absentee angel and Elizabeth's subsequent five months of seclusion made me feel, at first, a profound sense of loneliness on her behalf. Did she not deserve an annunciation of her own? But Elizabeth's consolation is the greater visitation that awaits her in six months. Rainer Maria Rilke, in his poem "Visitation of the Virgin," as translated by C.F. MacIntyre, says that the newly-pregnant Mary "was encompassed by her plenitude," and that

[...] she felt that no one ever could  
surpass the bigness she was feeling now.

She had to lay her hand upon the other  
woman's body, still more ripe than hers.

As I heard the late, former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold once observe, it is only when communing with her cousin that Mary proclaims the Magnificat. It is not a song for Gabriel, but for her kin. Elizabeth hails Mary as the mother of God before anyone else.

How could an angel ever compare to that?

***-Kathryn Haydon, Ph.D.***

# ***TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23***

1 Samuel 2:1b-10; Titus 2:1-10; Luke 1:26-38

In the Annunciation story, the Angel Gabriel brings Mary some *kind-of-important* news – a pivotal moment for Mary when God calls on her to play a part in his great plan. And she does not disappoint. She takes on the great responsibility, leadership, and burden of being the mother of Jesus – quite literally bringing Christ into the world.

Take a moment and ask yourself: who or what currently serves as your “Gabriel?” What is trying to deliver God’s call to you to do your part to bring Christ into the world? Would you be able to hear it? The Gabriels of today aren’t so striking. They don’t announce themselves at your door, bathed in golden light. And their messages are often drowned out by all the white noise in our lives. But put in the smallest effort, and you will start to see your Gabriels all around. Maybe it is a snippet of a sermon that keeps coming to mind. Maybe it’s a news story that leaves you unsettled for days. Or a commercial, or book, or interaction with a stranger... Who is to say? The important thing is that we *pay attention* when our Gabriel arrives and then *respond* to God’s call.

That’s the harder part. Life today is so hectic, where do you find the time to do *more*? And surely there are better-suited people who can make a bigger difference, right? Wrong. Mary did not ask to have such immense responsibility and burden given to her. Surely, she wondered, “Why me?” But that didn’t stop her from accepting God’s call wholeheartedly. She says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). As Christians, we are called to bring Christ into the world, each in our own way, and we can’t shirk the responsibility or wave it away. We must act.

So when you recognize your Gabriel and you hear God’s message calling you to act, ask yourself – “Why NOT me? Why NOT now?” and then, “Ok, where do I start?”

***-Jacquelyn VanWeelden***

# ***WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24***

## **CHRISTMAS EVE**

2 Samuel 7:1-17; Titus 2:11-3:8a; Luke 1:39-48a(48b-56)

Through a girl named Mary and her brief encounter with God a remarkable and life-changing thing happened as God came into the world in the form of human being, Jesus Christ. For Christian people Christmas is a time filled with meaning when we celebrate the birth of the promised one, the Messiah who was born to a young virgin who was chosen by God for a special purpose.

It has been pointed out that Christmas isn't about giving or receiving gifts or decorating a tree. It isn't about singing Christmas carols or hymns. Christmas is about the way in which people like you and me share in what happened to Mary when she was filled with the Holy Spirit who announced to her that she would give birth to a child.

We can see the power of that Spirit moving in Mary during her visit with Elizabeth when she began to celebrate the blessing she had received from God. My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed. The child that the Blessed Virgin Mary carried in her womb was born to be a savior, our Savior.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, let your spirit rejoice in God and may you know and feel the hope and joy of God's presence that Mary experienced. And remember as Ann Weems reminds us, that what happened to Mary continues because...the birthing is not over; the blessings continue.

***-The Reverend David Hodges***



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