

# Lenten Meditations 2024

*A collection of devotions on service and outreach by  
Holy Innocents' Staff.*

## Introduction

Lent is patterned on Jesus' forty day sojourn in the desert. Yet, it has forty-six days in this strange season when you include Sundays. The tradition holds that those Sundays are meant as moments of refreshment and reminder of Easter in a long, difficult stretch. Some will even say that the spiritual disciplines we might take on should be relaxed on those days. Of course, I have a sarcastic friend who rightly noted, "Sure. Take a break and eat some chocolate. I remember well how Jesus stopped at the seven-eleven on the sabbath for a break."

I share that story because it is so quintessentially American. We know the work is hard. We know the spiritual practice of taking on prayer or fasting or bible reading is important. And we are looking for a way to make it just a little easier in our land where instant gratification often rules.

Lent is an invitation to change our lives. Literally. God calls us to try something new and do it for a long enough season that it becomes a new habit. For two thousand years, this has been the calling of Christians. In the last 30-40 years, behavioral experts have found that it does indeed take thirty to forty days to train ourselves to try something new.

So, the invitation here is simple: try something new that will bring you closer to God and one another. Do it every day of Lent, all 46 days. Do it to make your life better but do it especially to enrich the lives of those around you. Pray daily. Volunteer for the outreach. Visit someone who cannot visit you. Find ways to push yourself out of a comfortable cocoon. Do the work. And you will find that Lent is about conversion- a reminder that we always need to turn again towards God.

*Bill +*

## Outreach Opportunities

As we begin our Lenten journey of reflection, repentance, and renewal of our faith, let us remember Jesus' sacrificial love for us and practice that love in meaningful ways in our community. In the spirit of John Porter's Lenten meditation, the Outreach Committee will collect much-needed shoes, socks, and ointments for our brothers at the Church of the Common Ground. Most of these men live unhoused on the streets of Atlanta and have only one pair of shoes to last an entire year. Many have medical conditions and need therapeutic socks and ointments. We ask you to embrace their needs by donating new or very gently used black athletic-type shoes, new socks, and ointments. Look for more information online in HI Lights and flyers in Bishop Commons.

A second opportunity concludes at Easter with a joyous celebration for the children of Solidarity Sandy Springs. Again this year, we will collect candy, small gifts, and other goodies to fill decorated Easter bags for our neighbors and their kids. Plans are underway for a joyful celebration and a visit from the Easter Bunny! More information on donations and volunteer opportunities will follow. Please join us during Lent as we deepen our connections to God and our communities.

## Ash Wednesday | February 14

JOHN PORTER

Singer/songwriter Harry Belafonte, in a midnight phone call, gave the composers the theme: "People are dying. We need to find people willing to save them." Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson were on the call. Thus it came to be that June 4, 1985 has been called the Greatest Night in Music. Twenty-two of the grandest musicians in the world would sing a hymn in support of those without a voice. Twenty million copies sold in a month. This music fed the starving children of Africa. We always need some folks to try to save the world.

*There comes a time when we hear a certain call,  
when the world must come together as one. There are people dying,  
Oh, it's time to lend a hand ...to Life, the greatest gift of all.  
We are the world. We are the children. We are the ones to make a brighter day  
so let's start giving...There's a choice we're making, We're saving our own lives.  
It's true we'll make a better day, just you and me.*

Richie, Jackson USA AFRICA 1985

Did you know: Good King Wenceslas is a real person. In Bohemia. He was known as Vaclav the Good. He was only 28 when he died. Young as he was, he made his mark.

*Hither, page, and stand by me if thou know'st telling,  
yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?  
Sire, he lives a good league hence underneath the mountain,  
right against the forest fence by Saint Agnes' fountain.  
Then bring me flesh and bring me wine, bring me pine logs hither.  
Thou and I will see him dine as we bear him hither...  
Sire, the night is darker now and the wind blows stronger,  
fails my heart, I know not how I can go no longer.  
Mark my footsteps, my good page  
Tread thou in them boldly, thou shall find the winter's rage  
Freeze thy blood less coldly  
Ye who now shall bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.*

John Mason Neale 1853 *Tempus Adest Floridum*

Now everyone knows his name.

## Thursday, February 15

JOHN PORTER

Our grandson Robert is a baker in a large grocery store. He works through the night hours. Each night, his team arrives at the store at 11:00 PM. He looks at the night schedule, gathers and mixes the ingredients, heats the ovens, and bakes the yummy bagels, doughnuts, rolls, cakes, pies, and breads of every description. At 6:00 AM, he is finished. The shelves of the store are stocked. The doors are open, and the customers pick the treats from the prepared abundance. Sometimes, he will drive by our house and leave a basket. "Thanks Bobby" we shout. "My treat" he answers.

The sufferings of the world haunt me. There is so much suffering. The problems are daunting, the solutions are few. The plight of the poor is not my fault. Besides, there is nothing much anyone can and will do about it. The average American uses five times as much grain per year as 2,000,000,000 persons will use living in the third world. We consume 2,000 pounds of grain each year. All by ourselves! Each one of us. If a poor person in a poor country can consume 150 pounds, he is living high on the hog. I just hate to read stuff like this.

Jesus thought quite a bit about those folk who make the world a better place. Especially those who must endure the hardship of life. *"Come to me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy; I will give you relief. Bend your backs to the yoke and I will give you relief. Learn from me for I am gentle and humble-hearted. My yoke is good to bear, and my load is light.."* Matthew 10:42



## Friday, February 16

JOHN PORTER

Recently, the temperature was 12 degrees. It was colder in my front yard than Trondheim, Norway, by one degree. Talking about the weather can serve as an icebreaker. Pardon the pun.

“Hey, Shirley. Good Morning! Pretty cold this morning.”

Shirley was getting her register ready for the check out Costco madness.

“Yes, Mr. John. Very cold. Had trouble with the car starting. That cold weather starter is not dependable. No Sir.”

“At least, you are warm here.”

“True, but I could be warm at home in bed too.” She laughs at her wittiness.

“Did you have a good weekend? Get some sleep?”

“No. I had to work. Inventory time. All hands on deck. Big task. Very busy. Took all night. Right back at it now.”

Shirley shook her head in self affirmation. On the register, her fingers are a blur as she charges through my purchases. No chatter now. No small talk. She is intent on her task.

She rips the receipt from the machine and hands it to me: “Have a good one, Mr. John. Have a blessed day.”

“Be well, Shirley”

100,000,000 children and seniors live at the poverty line. Or below. 50% are people of color. For a family of four, that is \$30,000 yearly. Poverty is on the rise. It is relentless and vicious and unforgiving. 37,900,000 of these Americans work full time jobs.

*We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy and impatience of our lives...our self-indulgent appetites and ways...our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts...our blindness to human need and suffering...*

Litany of Penitence for Ash Wednesday from The Book of Common Prayer.

## Saturday, February 17

JOHN PORTER

Here is a thought for today.

Who taught us that poverty is a failure of our own making? I have heard that vicious untruth all my life from all sorts of people. Poverty is not a shortage of courage, drive, ambition, effort, and self-worth. Poverty is not a character failing or a lack of motivation. Poverty is a shortage of money. It is vicious.

Our daughter in law is an artist/photographer. She has displayed her work in galleries and museums. We had been viewing one of her exhibitions at Georgia State University. We thought that it would be fun to buy some take away and have a picnic with our granddaughter. As we entered the park off Gilmer Avenue, we passed a homeless man sleeping, covered with newspapers and a canvas tarp. We just walked by. But not our young granddaughter, "Daddy, that man is so sick." "No. No." Daddy replied: "Stay away. Let him be." "Oh please, help him!" she cried. It was tense for a minute or two.

Of course, we walked by. Luckily she did as well, and mercifully she forgot about the man. Our picnic proceeded without further interruption. How to explain any of this! The name of the park is Hurt Park. The poorest of the poor in our city gather for companionship in Hurt Park. It seems aptly named.

I knew of a poem. I do not know who wrote the poem, but the words have stayed with me.

*"Homeless not Harmful.  
Jobless but Hopeful.  
Penniless not Hurtful.  
Won't steal, will work;  
Won't hurt you, will thank you;  
Won't scare you, will reassure you.  
Looking for kindness, not meanness;  
Seeking work, not idleness;  
I am homeless, not harmful."*

# The First Sunday in Lent | February 18

JOHN PORTER

Matilda is 62 and we are celebrating her birthday. She has worked for the same veterinarian for over 40 years. She has no children. She has no siblings. Her mother died last year. Her father died in 2021.

“I moved back home into their house to care for them. That was nine years ago. I was so close to my parents. They meant everything to me. We were best friends. Does that seem strange to you?”

Before I could answer, she told me more.

“They are gone now and I feel so lonely. I spent my savings on their medical bills. They would have done that for me. But loneliness is my lot and portion now. Their deaths have devastated me, emotionally and financially. Depression is my companion. It’s a bummer! I have an abscess in my molars. Flares up without warning. Dentist estimates that it will cost \$3500. It will have to wait. Another bummer.”

Here is a worthy thought: If, by some miracle, an angel came to you and volunteered to show you your own soul - just as God sees you - would you be eager to see yourself?

“At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.”

“Are there no prisons? And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation? The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor?”

“They are. I wish I could say they were not.”

“I was afraid from what you said that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course. I am very glad to hear it.”

“What shall we put you down for?”

“Nothing....”

“You wish to be anonymous.”

“I wish to be left alone!”

*A Christmas Carol* Charles Dickens, Stave One ‘Marley’s Ghost’

## Monday, February 19

JOHN PORTER

I sang this song in Bible school when I was a young boy.

*“I got shoes. You got shoes. All God’s children got shoes.  
When I get to heaven, I’m gonna put on my new shoes  
I’m gonna walk all over heaven in my shoes.  
I got shoes. You got shoes.  
All God’s children got shoes.”*

Pretty song. But not at all true. Over 1.5 billion people on this earth are so poor they do not own a single pair of shoes. I know thousands upon thousands of Haitians who do not own shoes.

Guess what? I own 8 pairs of shoes. Shoes of many types. All sorts of shoes,

I bought William a pair of shoes. He has a disability, a word he freely uses to describe himself. He needs special shoes. But that is not all he needs. He needs medicines, his prescriptions to ease the swelling in his feet cost him \$450 a month. He does not have that money. He chuckles: “I only buy that med when my feets they be barkin....”

William is always laughing. “Yeah, Pastor, it’s food for my tummy or perfume for my feet. I can’t do both. I try to reason with my feet. Stop barkin.”

He laughs again.

How many pairs of shoes are in your closet? Hmmm!





## Tuesday, February 20

JOHN PORTER

Lydia volunteers at the Community Assistance Center here in Sandy Springs. “Just once a week,” she says. “It is my opportunity to give back and be grateful. I look at people and think of something St. Francis of Assisi once said: ‘there but for the grace of God go I.’

“I like what the saint said. I use it as a prayer. It helps me.”

I move along and soon see Jasmine. I know her from some of the coffee shops around town. She is a philosopher. I learn tons of things from her. Just out of college, she desires to be a community organizer. Any community would be so fortunate to showcase her talents.

“Did you know,” she says “that most crises that take the knees out from under us come without warning? The things you and I experience as inconveniences and temporary setbacks, really buckle others less fortunate. Cut them off at the knees. You cannot stand up on broken knees. I volunteer at a boys’ and girls’ club and 90% of those kids belong to families living below the poverty line.”

Robin Williams sculpted a life out of comedy. He always insisted that the only weapons we need are love and laughter. He also had his share of suffering. I have always paid attention to what he taught me. Everyone is carrying some kind of burden and fighting some kind of battle. Be kind. Always. I think some people do try their hardest to offer others happiness. Maybe they know what it feels like to feel absolutely worthless, and they don’t want anyone else to feel that way. I do believe in love. It is wonderful.

I used to think that the worst thing in life was to be alone. It isn’t. The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel alone.

The things we fear most have already happened to us.

You will have bad times. But those times can awaken you to what really matters.

## Wednesday, February 21

RUTH PATTISON

### THE O ANTIPHONS AS NAMES FOR THE MESSIAH

The song we sing. “O come O Come Emmanuel” I love it so. Maybe because my boy, when he was in 5th grade, learned to play it on the recorder at school and he sat on our back stairs and played it for me, lilting piped notes, crushing me with joy.

And, I suppose, because never an Advent passes that we don’t sing it with all our urgent, pleading, “O” s. O Dayspring. O Key of David. O Rex Gentium. Pleading, pressing God to come to us. It stokes the wonder, of who this could be. This God to earth come down.

Our quintessential Advent Hymn is actually an 8th century collection of antiphons. Each verse, each name, is the sung pre-word to another song: Mary’s song. These antiphons are a musical setting to cradle The Magnificat.

Mary’s song sounds like Christmas, but Magnificat is our daily fare. The church couches our day with Mary’s song of salvation, appointing it to be sung in morning prayer, and at eventide.

Magnificat is Mary’s gold-gilded sung version of the daily work of salvation. The work it takes to imagine justice, and equity, and the grit and grind of the everydayness of working out our salvation. We work alongside the one she birthed. He is our song, our power and strength, our gentle justice and gracious healing, our forgiving, and our joy.

Her song is about the one who kicks in her womb, who is to be born; it is her vision for how he could change everything. She picks up the ancient song of the prophets, and bestows it on us. It calls us into the world.

It is Lent now. Advent expectation has given way to Incarnation. The one who was to come, is here. Mary’s extraordinary expectations are now full-grown and talking and eating and sailing and healing and fishing and singing and feasting and praying and he comes walking seaside, calling our names. He wants our partnership.

Mary told him at the Wedding at Cana, “Its time,” as if she were birthing him all over again. Its time. Now.

## Thursday, February 22

RUTH PATTISON

### O EMMANUEL

*“Tell my servant David: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? . . .since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, I have been moving about in a tent . . .I have been with you wherever you went.” 2 Samuel 7*

Poles that unhinge. Walls that roll up. God lived in the trenches, traveled by tent, with his people. David wanted God to settle down in a house of cedar, luminous and unshakable. God liked the tent.

Habitat means “conditions that are conducive to life.” We think of polliwogs and pond life, polar bears, and glacier caps. Habitat for Humanity, and we think of hammers and nails and a roof overhead, food for the table and a place to lie down in safety.

What about the Holy One? Conditions conducive to holy life? Could it really be, that God thrives among us, and just wants to be with us? To come and go, with us? To stop and stay with us? That’s all God needs or wants? A holy habitation, God with?

Gabriel asked Mary. Will you be the tent, the place? The house? The indwelling presence of God, growing, and showing. Her famous ‘yes,’ when she couldn’t possibly know.

And what do we know about keeping this Holy company, with God-in-the-trenches-tent-dweller? I understand the tent life. Its raw and fresh and vulnerable, minimal, elemental, physical, demanding, and a lot of work. Is that what Emmanuel means? To be God with us in this way? Taking God out into the world with us, like pitching tents?

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, we pine and plead in Advent, when, like Mary, we couldn’t possibly know.

Nevertheless, we say “yes”, and live the promise of the Antiphon: O Emmanuel

We live the promise of God with us in death and the grave.

We live the promise of God with us in defeat.

We live the promise of God with us as we confront injustice.

We live the promise of God with us in the midst of our despair.

O Emmanuel.

We live the promise of God with us in new life.

We live the promise of God with us in victory.

We live the promise of God with us as in peace and equity.

We live the promise of God with us in hope and joy.

## Friday, February 23

RUTH PATTISON

### O ADONAI

*“Make speed to help thy servants who are assaulted by manifold temptations; and, as thou knowest their several infirmities, let each one find thee mighty to save;” Collect, BCP p. 166*

Mighty to save is language of allusion to the Moses story and the Exodus. In those three little words, the identity of the Old Testament God is conjured and we are taking off our shoes, for the ground is Holy. Adonai is the Lord Almighty.

It is Lent. Right out of the gate we say it, we need him to save us. It is Lent, and our liturgy drops us into Egypt to see ourselves. To see that each one of us is in bondage and in need of saving. We pray: let each one find thee, mighty to save. In Advent we pray "O Adonai, Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free." In ordinary time we sing Love Divine, "Come Almighty to deliver. . ."

It seems that somewhere along the line we get into trouble and need an Exodus, at least once a year.

We dismiss this lawgiver king of Isaiah too quickly. We think he is the God of fire and brimstone and Great Awakening preachers. But Adonai is fire in the bush that burns but doesn't consume. Adonai reveals his name to Moses. Adonai is knowable. Adonai lead his children out of Egypt and gave the law on Sinai's height. Adonai, will deliver his people.

How often have I wanted deliverance? Felt some need for saving? Needed a way out? Craved a Holy Fire that does not consume?

This son of Mary, John writes, came into the world "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved."

We sing Mary's song, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

We tell stories over the water at Baptism, and this is one of the stories we tell.

*“. . . Through it, you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.” BCP 306.*

We are baptized into Adonai.

We pray it in The Great Litany.

*Spare us, good Lord.*

*Good Lord, deliver us.*

*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

It is Lent.

Let each one find thee mighty to save.

## Saturday, February 24

RUTH PATTISON

### O CLAVIS DAVID

*“I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.” Isaiah 22:22*

My nephew married in the Greek Orthodox church. The luxury of ceremonial repetition afforded me the pleasure of wandering off in my imagination to the Icon on the left flanking wall:

The Anastasis  
The Resurrection

Jesus, the resurrected Christ, crouching forward, barefoot on the iron crossbeams of a broken-down gate. A grave below him to his right, one to his left, and Jesus, reaching his hand to pull a man out of one, a woman out of the other.

The Icon is sometimes called  
The Harrowing of Hades  
or The Descent into Hell

When I first prayed this Icon, I noticed that the man was dressed in white just like Jesus. Who would have the gall? But as it turns out, its the first Adam, who matches the second Adam because of their shared humanity, identical garb.

From the other grave, a woman of red earth, who could only be the companion part to his humanity. Bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

I was stunned at the implications. Stunned to realize, by the skeleton keys and locks scattered in the Abyss between the graves, that here, all of humanity was set free from hell.

~~~ “O Key of David!” ~~~

“Who opens and no one will shut” in Isaiah and Revelation, both.

The Key of David, come to our grave, to open the gates of hell and harrow hades!

Our wedding prayers say: “Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Adam and Eve and all the rest of us thrown in!

The grit and grind of the everyday-ness of working out our salvation is that we say with Adam ~~~ this now ~~~ is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. This now, any other human being, this one at my table; or walking his dog; or in the car ahead of me; or wandering alone; this now, is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. If we do this work, we will have harrowed hell.

## The Second Sunday in Lent | February 25

RUTH PATTISON

### O ORIEN

*“Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs;  
You make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.”*

I love a January sky, bare branches and midwinter light. My second story window gifts me daily with a morning greeting of the world in unclothed simplicity, waking. An enormous hawk loves to perch in the top branches of the great white oak, and a brilliant red bird yesterday, shocking against the otherwise colorless landscape of winter trees, rooftop shingles, and dimly lit cumulus clouds. A vision every morning of a dawn that sings for joy.

The sun travels ever so slightly during our chapel liturgy on Sunday mornings, and slowly, bit by bit, we watch the branches illuminate, not with stunning brilliance, but with delicate outline, like dawn, just breaking, for this mutual witness we share, we of the light and the light of us. Or like the elusive rays of first light, or like what we call the unborn Christ on Dec. 21st, O Dayspring, O Radiant Dawn, O Oriens, Splendor of eternal light, O Sun of Justice. And we add “come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

Don't you sometimes want to begin again? Start over? Get a second chance, or a fourth or fifth, or hundredth chance? Shed the darkness and shadow?

O Sun of Justice, and for everyone and anyone who still breathes, every morning, a new orientation of ourselves, our hearts and minds, toward East, toward our Dayspring, O Splendor of eternal light. O Orien. Like the winter sky, Magnificat anticipates this for us, a new day:

*“He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel  
as he promised to our forefathers Abraham, and his seed forever.”*

We're the seeds. This promise extends to us, for mercy. This is our language for Lent, we plead for mercy. Even in the dark pages of Lamentations:

*“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an  
end; they are new every morning”*

*O Dayspring*

*O Winter Sky*

## Monday, February 26

BILL MURRAY

### MOCKINGBIRD BY WENDELL BERRY

*A gracious Sabbath stood here while they stood  
Who gave our rest a haven.*

*Now fallen, they are given  
To labor and distress.*

*These times we know much evil, little good  
To steady us in faith*

*And comfort when our losses press  
Hard on us, and we choose,*

*In panic or despair or both,  
To keep what we will lose.*

*For we are fallen like the trees, our peace  
Broken, and so we must*

*Love where we cannot trust,  
Trust where we cannot know,*

*And must await the wayward-coming grace  
That joins living and dead,*

*Taking us where we would not go—  
Into the boundless dark.*

*When what was made has been unmade  
The Maker comes to His work.*

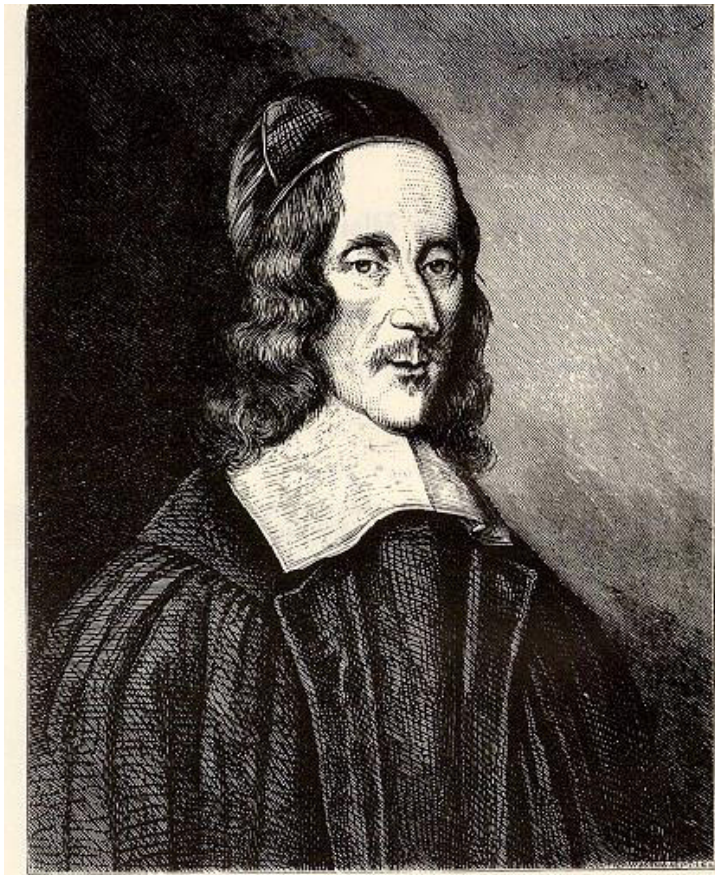


## Tuesday, February 27

BILL MURRAY

### THE FEAST OF REV. GEORGE HERBERT

Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth  
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days world transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;  
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,  
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices; something understood.





## Wednesday, February 28

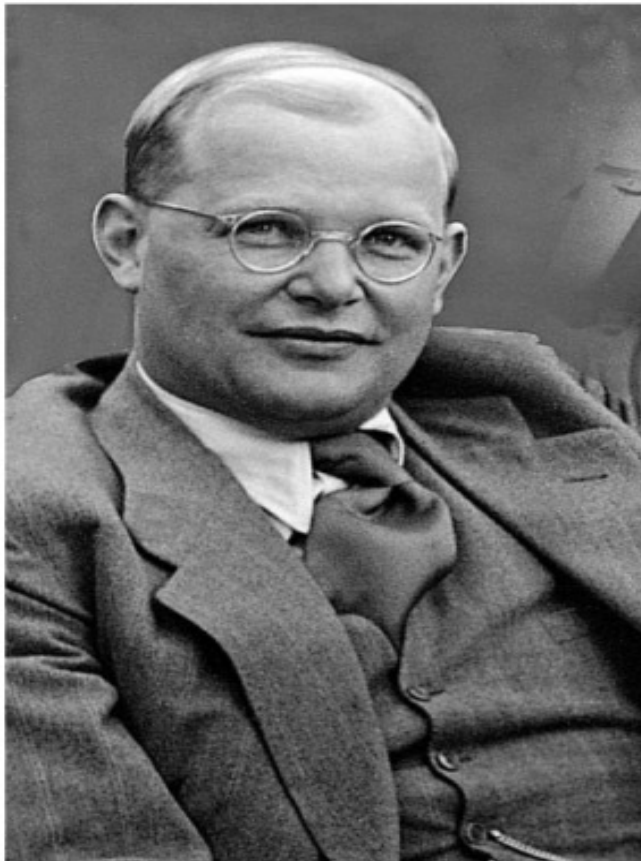
BILL MURRAY

*CHRISTIANS AND PAGANS, BY DIETRICH BONHOEFFER IN JULY 1944*

*People turn to God when they're in need,  
plead for help, contentment, and for bread,  
for rescue from their sickness, guilt, and death.  
They all do so, both Christian and pagan.*

*People turn to God in God's own need,  
and find God poor, degraded, without roof or bread,  
see God devoured by sin, weakness, and death.  
Christians stand with God to share God's pain.*

*God turns to all people in their need,  
nourishes body and soul with God's own bread,  
takes up the cross for Christians and pagans, both,  
and in forgiving both, is slain.*

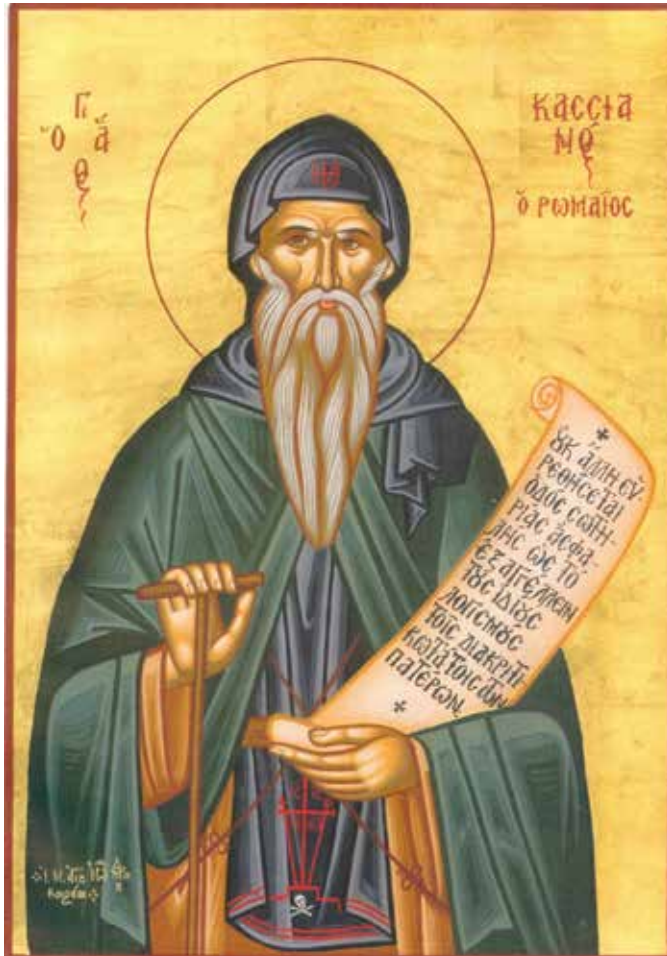


## Thursday, February 29

BILL MURRAY

### FEAST OF CASSIAN

I love to meet folks who have birthdays on Feb 29. You always wonder how they celebrate a birthday that shows up every four years. I never thought they would assign a feast day to a saint. It will not happen again until 2028- but today we celebrate John Cassian. In a time before monasticism officially existed in 350 AD, he went on a quest to find God and sought a method to reach God. He went to the Egyptian fathers who retreated to the desert to find God alone. He stayed there to learn their secrets. In the end, he moved to Spain and started a monastic community. He found that while the desert fathers believed in an individual quest, God was best found in a community of people with a shared dream. How very ironic then that we throw his feast on a day that shows up every 4 years. He is a fellow who strove to reach God in community. We should try to do the same.



## Friday, March 1

BILL MURRAY

### FEAST OF DAVID OF WALES, 544

We know Patrick and Nicholas and even Andrew as patron saints of countries. David is seldom mentioned in the same breath, but David is the patron saint of Wales. And David is actually Welsh - unlike Patrick who was English, Nicholas who was Turkish, and Andrew who was Palestinian. David founded a monastery at a young age because he wanted to read and study and pray and be left alone. It didn't work out. In the 5th Century the pagan Angles and Saxons had conquered England. Only a small slice of Wales remained Christian. David was so learned and wise, he was elected Bishop. Then he was called to help with the heresy of Pelagius. He was so eloquent and accomplished, he was chosen to be the Archbishop of Wales. So much for quiet study. He founded multiple monasteries and maintained the faith in a country that had lost it. No easy task. God bless David, who followed his passion and discovered it was what the world desperately needed.



## Saturday, March 2

BILL MURRAY

### FEAST OF CHAD, BISHOP OF LICHFIELD 672

In this day and age when almost everyone wants to get an award, receive recognition or promote themselves via blogs and videos on the Internet, Chad stands as a stark reminder of the virtue of humility. One of four brothers dedicated to God's service, he was taught and ordained by St. Aidan on Lindesfarne, one of the centers of Celtic teaching and Christianity. He served with his brother at a monastery, deferring to his brother as leader of the community. He was asked to be Bishop of York and was consecrated by four Celtic leaders. When Theodore became Archbishop of Canterbury 4 years later, he noted that the consecration was irregular and could not stand. Chad's response? He resigned. He said humbly, "I never believed myself worthy of it." His reward for such humility? Theodore had him ordained again and placed him as Bishop of Lichfield. He walked everywhere to meet his common man and minister to him. Theodore demanded that he ride a horse. When Chad refused, the large Theodore picked him up and put him on the horse himself. Chad chose to walk because he wished to see his fellow Christian, eye to eye. He was celebrated for his humility in an age where being in charge was a sign of power and respect. He chose service and connection. May we seek to do the same.



## The Third Sunday in Lent, March 3

RENEE STEPHENS

*“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”*

*Psalm 42:1*

This has always been my favorite line from the Psalms. I find it so helpful to imagine a deer coming out from a forest on a beautiful spring day. The trees billowing and rustling, the birds chirping and maybe off in the distance a bunny and a squirrel playing tag. The stream of fresh water rolls gently along its path right beside this clearing and the deer can sense it from miles away. Its inner guide has brought it to this very spot for the necessity of the life-giving water. It has no other need in the moment. Only the fresh drops from the spring and the refreshment and renewal it provides. This is exactly what our longing for God should be. Our soul, emerging from the forest, longing for the lifegiving waters. The journey might have been long and treacherous, and we might be bruised or ill or brokenhearted but in a moment it will all be okay because we are arriving at the source. As soon as that first sip hits our parched tongue, we remember it all in a flash. The blinding light of eternal love and peace. The warmth of the biggest hug you’ve ever had. This is our soul panting for God. And the beauty is that it can happen in a moment, a flash. Wherever you are, you can drop your boundaries, step out of the forest and take a sip. It's entirely too easy to ignore our soul's instinct because the grind of daily life is so demanding. We don't have time to stop and sit at the stream because there is work to be done and plans to be made. But today, you are invited to set down your work even for just a moment and sit in silence. Sit in the truth that you are loved and held and then think of one way that you can reflect that in the world today.



## Monday, March 4

RENEE STEPHENS

If you've ever known a young child, then you know that for them every day is an adventure. Every moment is a whole experience and there is no limit to the joy and wonder they can create. Something like this is a regular occurrence in my household:

“Ok we're out of eggs, let's run to the store and get a few things.”

“Alright, but I'm wearing my red shoes and the new pants I just got. And this construction helmet. And I have to carry my shield too. And when we get there, I want to ride in a car cart.”

“Ok sounds great. Let's do it.”

“Ok let me just fight this dragon and then I'll be ready.”

Not only is there magic imbued in everything from a walk in a park to helping put the laundry detergent in the washer but they also summon all the mysteries of the universe through their powerful imaginations. These limitless adventures open our living room to a fantastical world where they are the ones who hold the power and decide who are the rulers and who are the subjects. This is not unlike our experience in the world. Humans have invented systems and hierarchies that give some of us a very easy life. But then those who aren't born into the good graces of the system suffer for lack of resources. It's up to us who do have the resources to offer generosity and grace out of our abundance as Jesus concludes from a parable, “from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” Luke 12:48. And our abundance is not just our money but our love and compassion for each other.



## Tuesday, March 5

RENEE STEPHENS

*“Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious lived in a parched land.” Psalm 68:5-6*

There are moments that feel so absolutely perfect. Days when the brisk autumn wind offers a subtle warmth to your soul. The bare trees a reminder that even loss can birth beauty in due season. The sun shines through the clouds. A fire glows and crackles. Children are laughing. You hold a warm drink in your hand and the cares and concerns of the outside world are far from mind. These are the moments we want to soak deeply in. Like a rich lather that cleanses away the grime of the daily grind. It's moments like these that we are created for. It's this kind of moment that's like a thin place between the physical and spiritual worlds. It's a glimpse into the eternal unchanging nature of the divine. The peace that surpasses all understanding. You may have heard this popular translation of Esther 4:14: “Perhaps this is the moment for which you have been created.” In this situation, Esther's uncle is convincing her to petition the king on behalf of the people of God saying that God brought her to this specific time and place for this very reason. This has become a popular encouragement for all of us to seize the moment. In every moment we have the opportunity to either show God's love and grace or we can show something less than that. And even when we get it wrong (because we all do) we still have another opportunity in the next moment. Just as God continuously offers us grace and compassion and forgiveness so too are we called to the same to each other.

## Wednesday, March 6

RENEE STEPHENS

*“Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me. But may you have mercy on me, Lord” Psalm 41:9-10*

In the popular musical, Hamilton, there is a part near the end that highlights grief and forgiveness and unimaginable love. Alexander and his wife Eliza are grieving the tragic loss of their adult son. They have also been separated ever since Alexander had an affair. The scene opens with the lyrics “There are moments that the words don’t reach. There is suffering too terrible to name.” And then the scene goes on to reflect the deep grief of suddenly losing someone you love. A void opens in your being and suddenly everything is in slow motion. In the musical, everything is tinted blue, but it looks different for each of us when it happens. Everything that was is suddenly different now and we cling desperately to some semblance of the past. The peace and security that we knew before. Things that used to be so big like what to eat for dinner or where to go on Friday night are suddenly so trivial. The only thing that matters is the next breath and how that carries you to the next one. We see Alexander’s grief and then we see him walk up and stand next to Eliza. He knows he’s done wrong, and he begs her forgiveness. She stands there stoically and then we hear the concluding verse “There are moments when the words don’t reach. There’s a grace too powerful to name. We push away what we could never understand. We push away the unimaginable.... Forgiveness.”

Sometimes, it is a million times easier to give money to charitable causes, to pick up canned goods and bring them to the food pantry, or to clean out your closets and give to those in need than it is to offer forgiveness. Offering forgiveness requires stripping away layers of armor that we put between ourselves and others. It requires that we remember that we too are recipients of a grace too powerful to name.



## Thursday, March 7

STEWART LUCAS

*This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*

Genesis 9:12-13

We need to sit some more with Genesis 9. We do a great job teaching the story to our children, but in hindsight, I wonder if I was taught the right ‘moral of the story’ on that felt board in my Sunday School class. I just remember that God called Noah to build a boat and save all the animals. Then it eventually all dried up and there was a rainbow.

But the story is about so much more. God is making a covenant never to destroy everything again. And the rainbow was actually not for us to remember but for God to remember his covenant. I’m not sure we always remember that when we see a rainbow.

Lent is a time when those who were preparing for baptism during Easter are learning the Catechism, what we say we believe. Unfortunately there is no mention of our care of creation in the Catechism or Baptismal Covenant. If I were rewriting the Book of Common Prayer, I would like to change that. At Holy Innocents we do try to make sure we continue to repent of the way we have failed to care for creation and ask for God’s guidance in doing better to preserve the beauty of creation for future generations.

*Give us a reverence for the earth as your own creation,  
that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor  
and glory. (Prayers of the People, Form IV, Book of Common Prayer, p. 388)*

What are you doing at home to make a tiny difference this Lent?

## Friday, March 8

STEWART LUCAS

### *SPACE*

It will not surprise some of you that I was the yearbook editor in highschool. We had our own room with a lock on the door where we could hide out after lunch. We felt very important. We got into the school when others couldn't working late into the night to meet our deadlines. That was back when you had to crop your pictures with a wax pencil and use graph paper to design.

One of the critical factors in print design is white space. Sometimes when Emily and I are putting together the Sunday bulletins, we try to cram absolutely everything onto the paper. The fonts get smaller; the margins get narrower. And then we print out a draft and realize that we cannot read any of it because our eyes are just too exhausted by all of the mess of ink. We have to have more white space to see what's important.

Helen Keating is a Space Designer, Feng Shui Consultant who says that "The Japanese term for negative space...a gap, pause, or open space...is "Ma." Ma is the principle of creating interruptions or absences...moments of awareness and quiet...a free zone where dissimilar things can reconcile. Empty space provides both support and a respite from the other elements of the design...a quiet place for the eye to rest and allow for differences to be reconciled."

That's what I think Lent is all about – providing support and respite from everything else – a quiet place to rest. Have you found that space yet in your spiritual practices and prayer life? Look for it. Create it. Because there is room there for differences to be reconciled. As Helen writes, "Contrary to Western culture, more of a good thing is not better. When in doubt, opt for less. The more negative space there is, the more notable is the rest of the composition."

### THE JAPANESE CONCEPT OF "MA"



## Saturday, March 9

STEWART LUCAS

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" John 3:1-4*

I have always liked Nicodemus. We don't know very much about him except that he was one of the Pharisees. I imagine that to be a Pharisee, you had to have your life in order - a decent job, a beautiful wife and family and the respect of your friends and neighbors. The Pharisees were not very nice people though. As a group, they were always on Jesus' case. And yet Nicodemus was mystified by the signs and wonders that Jesus was performing. Perhaps he really wanted to believe in Jesus. Perhaps he was worried about what his friends would think of him if he talked to Jesus. So, one night after supper and after the kids were tucked in bed, he decided to approach Jesus. When he questioned Jesus about his signs and wonders, Jesus tried to teach him the truth about spiritual rebirth.

But we see later in the story that John writes for us that Nicodemus was deeply affected by this conversation that he had with Jesus. At one point Nicodemus courageously speaks out in defense of Jesus as he faced his trial, and after Jesus' death he joins with another disciple in preparing Jesus' body for burial. Nicodemus made a pilgrimage from not knowing and not being born again to having profound faith. However, his belief did not come without a price. Nicodemus had to stand up for what and for whom he believed. He risked having people dislike and even hate him for believing in Christ. He risked having to change his life completely.

Many may dislike us for being Christian. But we follow in the footsteps of our Savior who was mocked and scorned and put to death for his beliefs and actions. At Baptism, we die with him and are buried with him in water. We are raised up from the water into new life with Christ. We are born anew. We become part of the Church and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We become a part of a much larger family, the priesthood of all believers. And we learn by helping each other and our children walk down that winding spiritual pathway, our pilgrimage, struggling to find the answers to our difficult faith questions that pop up after dark.

## The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 10

STEWART LUCAS

*Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. Luke 11:9*

Today we remember Harriet Ross Tubman who was born in 1821 and died on this day in 1913. She was an abolitionist, born. She was born a slave in Dorchester County, Maryland. She was first named Araminta, and in 1849 she escaped from slavery and was a fugitive slave. Tubman became one of the leaders in the work of the Underground Railroad. She was given the name “Moses.” John Brown, the abolitionist who seized the U.S. arsenal at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, called her “General Tubman.” She helped more than 300 slaves to freedom as a major “conductor” of the Underground Railroad. After the war she lived in Auburn, New York, where she housed children and poor older people.

Her name Araminta comes from two names, probably English. Arabella, which itself comes from the Latin word orabilis, meaning yielding to prayer. Aminta, was a form of Amyntas, a Greek name meaning defender. Those seem to be perfect description so this brave persistent force of nature. After she was married, Araminta changed her name to Harriet to honor her mother, clearly an important influence on her life.

Persistence then is our word for the day. Are we persistent in our life of prayer this lent? Are we persistent in advocating for the poor and those suffering oppression and injustice? Where do we need to be more persistent in our advocacy and our generosity so that all may truly be free? Ask. Search. Knock. And then look for doors that open, leading to freedom and peace.



## Monday, March 11

STEWART LUCAS

*Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. Hebrews 3:5-6*

I'd like to ask the writer of the letter to the Hebrews a few questions. The pride that belongs to hope. I'm not sure I get that. Maybe it's because the word pride sets off a lot of alarms for me. I don't want to be prideful in an arrogant way. But I do want to be proud of the work we do as a community with beautiful worship, honest discussions, faithful advocacy and generosity. But pride is dangerous territory.

The Greek may be more like boast of our hope. Again, dangerous territory. I'll keep working on this. I have a feeling I'm not alone. The Message, a more contemporary Biblical translation often helps me when I'm struggling with difficult passages. See if this helps.

*So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He's the centerpiece of everything we believe, faithful in everything God gave him to do. Moses was also faithful, but Jesus gets far more honor. A builder is more valuable than a building any day. Every house has a builder, but the Builder behind them all is God. Moses did a good job in God's house, but it was all servant work, getting things ready for what was to come. Christ as Son is in charge of the house.*

*Now, if we can only keep a firm grip on this bold confidence, we're the house!*

*So watch your step, friends. Make sure there's no evil unbelief lying around that will trip you up and throw you off course, diverting you from the living God. For as long as God's still calling it Today, keep each other on your toes so sin doesn't slow down your reflexes. If we can only keep our grip on the sure thing we started out with, we're in this with Christ for the long haul.*

*Hebrews 1-6, 12-14*

## Tuesday March 12

MEGAN ATKINSON

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'* Isaiah 6:8

When I was little, I would spend at least an hour every morning finding the perfect pair of socks for my day. I would sit on the floor of my room and try on pair after pair, until I found the one that fit the best and felt the most comfortable.

Fast forward, and I now spend maybe 30 seconds of my morning finding two pairs of socks that don't match at all. Rather than focusing on perfection, my only rule is that my socks absolutely cannot match. While I have no idea how this wildly opposite routine began, I have a feeling it stemmed from my desire to cut down on "prep" time.

As we think about Lent, we are reminded that this is a time to slow down, prepare, and think things through. These actions allow us to step into the story of Christ's death and resurrection and better appreciate the circumstances, sacrifices, and emotions that went into the cross event. But not every occasion calls for such contemplation.

In Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah demonstrates such a time: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." In this moment, Isaiah knew that action was required rather than contemplation. Isaiah sprang into action, volunteering himself to be a voice for God, much like how we are called each day to spread the Word of Christ.

During this season of Lent, don't forget that while we are called to prepare our hearts and minds, we are also called to action. Quiet thoughts and peaceful moments are important, but so are bold actions and helping hands.



## Wednesday, March 13

Megan Atkinson

*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. John 15:8*

When I was in my twenties, I traveled to Romania to work with a Christian non-profit and stay with a loving host family. Throughout my experience, I encountered moments that instilled a deep appreciation for life's simple pleasures. One notable example was the daily breakfast provided by my host family, consisting of cheese and the most delicious tomatoes I have ever had. While it might sound absurd, these tomatoes made me realize how profound something as simple as fruit can be.

In John 15:8, we are reminded to produce fruit: "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." While I'm certain that the fruit referred to in this text does not include tomatoes, it does include simple but profound characteristics. We are called to produce all those beautiful traits of the Holy Spirit; love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This verse, which encourages us not only to bear fruit but to become disciples in the process, reminds us that our everyday actions are part of our ministry. As we celebrate lent, I invite you to engage in simple activities that could have life-changing results for someone else. Donate some old toys to a foster care program, pay for someone's meal, or pay for someone's Starbucks order. Be reminded of the simple tomato and the incredible impact something small can have.



## Thursday, March 14

Megan Atkinson

*But the Lord said to me,  
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you. Jeremiah 1:7*

Professor Nazeer Ahmed, a scholar and author, once wrote a story about a drought taking place in a small village. The drought had become so terrible that the people of the village decided to hold a meeting under a banyan tree and ask God for rain. They spent the day praying and calling out to God in desperation. Eventually, a small child came running through the crowd holding an open umbrella. The people called the child a fool and wondered why he would bring an umbrella if there was no rain. The child simply explained that if one prays for rain, one better be ready for when it comes. This response astonished the villagers who began to understand the difference between praying without expectation and praying with faith.

I share this story with you to remind you of the profound impact all people, both young and old, can have on someone's faith. Jeremiah 1:7 says, "But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." We are all called, no matter what age, to profess God's love, help those in need, and inspire faith in those who doubt.





## Friday, March 15

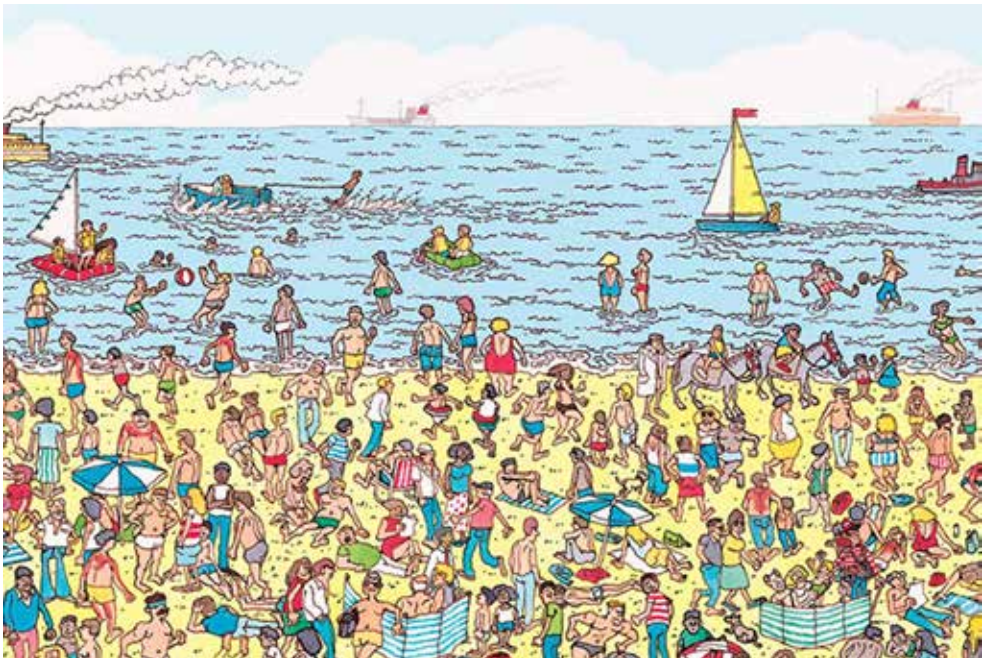
MEGAN ATKINSON

*For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.* Luke 19:10

Playing I-spy and Where's Waldo are two staple games that most children play at least a few times during their childhood. There's just something about locating a missing item that children find exciting. This theme of searching for what's lost can also be found in the Bible, particularly in Luke 19:10: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

In the game of life, Lent serves as a unique playing field, challenging us to go beyond the surface and explore the depths of our spiritual existence. Much like the intricate details in a Where's Waldo scene, the subtle moments and opportunities to connect with God are scattered throughout our daily lives. Lent encourages us to embrace the seeking mentality, to actively and intentionally search for these divine encounters.

Luke 19:10 emphasizes not only seeking the divine but also seeking the lost. Lent becomes a season of compassionate seeking, prompting us to extend our search beyond personal spiritual growth to actively seek out and support those who may feel disconnected or lost in their faith journey. It is a call to be the beacon of hope and guidance for those who may be wandering in the metaphorical crowd.





## **Saturday, March 16**

TAYLOR IRWIN

*The Water of Life*

James Janknegt

*While Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-38*

## Sunday, March 17

TAYLOR IRWIN

*“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” John 21:12*

*I'm gonna clear my head,*

*I'm gonna drink that sun,*

*I'm gonna love you good and strong while our love is good and young.*

*Get Out The Map*

The Indigo Girls

I love the Indigo Girls. I love the sound and the style, and as someone who dabbles in various instruments for recreation, I love recreating their music. But I also love the message of their music. This summer, I participated in a rather heated debate with a group of chaplains about whether you can call their music “spiritual” and use it for religious edification. I certainly do. Their messages of authenticity, longing, and justice resonate with me. Their questions and angst remind me of my wrestling with faith.

But my friend and fellow chaplain disagreed with me. For Christians, he argued, spiritual music needed to uplift the name of Jesus and profess our theology. The questioning, the angst, was flippant to him.

*“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”*

These weren't words coming from the Jews in the temple. These were Greeks, there amongst the festival. Asking about this mysterious man they had heard of. Outsiders. Yet still, from this most unexpected crew, we hear:

*“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”*

For me, seeing and experiencing Jesus can come in an Indigo Girls song or in the off-tune singing of some friends around a campfire. The request is not only to see Jesus but to be seen by Him.

Seeing Jesus means the ability to bring ourselves, all of who we are, and seeing God's pleasure in who we are. Because God takes pleasure in who God created us to be. I am not asking to see Jesus only with my eyes but to see and be seen in the depth of who I am.

*As we enter this week, I invite you to search, to see Jesus in unexpected places, in yourself and the world around you.*

## Monday, March 18

TAYLOR IRWIN

*The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ... When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

*Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."*

*John 7:53-8:11*

*Penitent: feeling or expressing humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses.*

*Oxford Dictionary*

Lent is a season of confession, humility, and penitence. As we walk together towards the cross, we remember a Jesus, despised and rejected, a Jesus religious leaders sought to kill. We recognize a stubborn, hardened, confused people who did not realize who Jesus is.

Lent is also a time of longing. Although the people around him did not always recognize Jesus, they longed for the relief, the respite he offered. They longed for healing, community, restoration, and justice, which Jesus brought in this radically different, unexpected form.

As we bring our hearts forward: penitent, longing.

Where are you the pharisee? What stones are you trying to cast? Who are you trying to condemn?

## Tuesday, March 19

TAYLOR IRWIN

Where are you the woman? *What are you longing for? Do you hear the Savior, saying to you, "Go on your way?"*

Today is the feast of St Joseph, the Earthly father of Jesus.

We know little about Joseph, but here are a few facts we do have.

Joseph was a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). He was what we might call a middle-class working man who, at the naming of Jesus, offered turtle doves, meaning he could not afford to offer the sacrifice of a lamb (Luke 2:24). Yet, Joseph was also of a royal lineage, a descendent of King David (Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38).

We know of Joseph with the child Jesus. We know he listened to the dream God sent him; he did not leave his betrothed, who became mysteriously pregnant, not by him. We know he raised Jesus in religious rituals, circumcising Jesus and taking the family to Passover each year. (Which would have been expensive for a working man!) We know he fled his homeland when his child was in trouble and worried with Mary when boy Jesus disappeared, having stayed at the temple. We also know that Joseph treated Jesus as his son, for Jesus is often called the Son of Joseph (Luke 4:22). Finally, we believe Jesus died while Jesus was young because he disappeared before Jesus enters public ministry.

What I find so poignant in the story of Joseph is just how much we see ourselves and our lives in the story. Were you the father figure, the dad who came in, who stepped up? The family that needed to flee? The exasperated parent whose kid thinks he's too smart? Have you ever looked around, bewildered, for the kid who managed to slip away? You only turned your back for a second! Have you worked hard and offered whatever sacrifice you can for your family? Joseph is there in each of your stories.

Do you grieve the loss of a parent? Do you find yourself far from home? Joseph, Jesus, their story meets you there too.

Today, we bring our stories, families, and lives before a God who welcomes them, who, made incarnate in Jesus Christ, lived this same reality.

*Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 20

TAYLOR IRWIN

*Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue... but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?"*

Daniel 3:13-18

In the story of the Pied Piper, a piper agrees to rid a town of the rats that are plaguing them if, in return, he is thanked and given payment. The piper plays his music, and the rats waltz out of the town. But, when the piper comes to receive his payment, he is denied. In return, he enters the town and once again plays. This time, the children follow him, not the pests. He leads them away into the mountains, never to be seen again.

There are parallels between the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and this children's tale of the pied piper. Imagine a child who resisted and refused to waltz along to the sound of the pied piper. Imagine yourself as that child.

*What is the sound, the pipes, the horn, the lyre, that would lull you away?*

*Who is that God that will deliver you out of the hands of that music?*

Of course, the town would never have been in this trouble had they honored their agreement and shown appreciation and acknowledgment for the piper's skill. Unlike the town, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remember their agreements and devotion to God, and they honor it, not allowing that music to lead them away.

*What agreements have you entered into on a personal, emotional, and spiritual level?*

*Who or what in your life deserves appreciation and acknowledgment?*

As we reflect today on these stories, may our acts of reflection and remembrance shield us from music that would lead us astray.

## Thursday, March 21

BILL MURRAY

Today is the Feast of Thomas Cranmer- the man most responsible for the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Many will claim that it is Henry VIII, but Cranmer did all the theological work and wrote the first and second Book of Common Prayer in order to guide the church. On his slim shoulders rest the majority of tradition in this branch of the Jesus Movement.

The towering intellect and political will of Cranmer can be seen in many areas of the prayer book. I find his choice to make the alms box or poor box a permanent fixture in Anglican Churches one of his most important. Before the idea of passing the plate, the church simply had a box near the entrance for people to give to the common good. Cranmer made the choice to continue the tradition with a separate box to care for those in need.

It was a simple and practical choice on one level. Here was a simple and passive way to encourage people to remember the poor. And yet, it also made a point of what this new, Protestant yet Catholic, Reformed yet Orthodox church would be. Cranmer made it clear that the church would continue to care for the poor as Christ commanded. The liturgies and robes might change but the call to care for the other would be a clear requirement for all.



## Friday, March 22

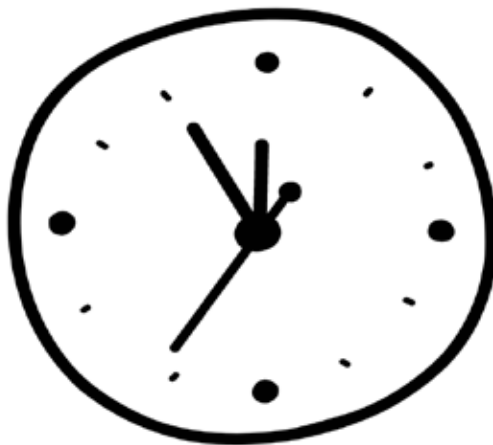
BILL MURRAY

Today is my son's fifteenth birthday. The day on which I became a father. The day that changed the world for Jessie, Mose, and me. In what we now know is a classic Mose move, he waited until just after midnight so that he would be born on his exact due date. Punctuality and showing up at the right place and right time has always been an important part of his life.

In first grade, his teacher would literally ask him what was next on the schedule and how much time was left in the class at hand. He would often remind her that it was time to finish one project and start another.

I sometimes wonder if God has such a desire for precision in our lives. Does God want us to be at a certain place and a certain time on a certain day? Does God order our lives in such detail to love and care for us – even while we wander around unsure of what might come next?

I don't know for sure. I can say that there have been more than a few times where I turned out to be exactly where I needed to be. I have looked back and realized God certainly seems to have plans for me even if I am not aware of them until later. There is something comforting in knowing that God can place us in just the right spot and is paying attention to every detail of our lives and schedules.





## Saturday, March 23

BILL MURRAY

I was excited to see that today is the feast of Gregory the Illuminator. I wondered what beautiful art work he had crafted to become a saint. I was wrong. He never drew or painted anything. He was called “Illuminator” because he brought the gospel to Armenia, and it became the first Christian nation in the world.

The idea is simply that Gregory brought the light of Christ into the darkness of the world. I love this description of our faith as illuminating. Faith should be a beacon of hope for others in their darkness. Faith should be the light that makes our path more clear. Faith should reveal the ways our world can be more like God has dreamed.

God’s light should shine for us all. How can we be the light that helps others find God? How can we be illuminators?



# Palm Sunday, March 25

RUTH PATTISON

## O REX GENTIUM

*"They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;  
neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:4*

Swords into plowshares.

Spears into pruning hooks.

Isaiah's vision of tools for the garden, paradise for humanity, the garden where we were once at home, our Eden land-grant.

But here we are, wandering the globe, with tools in hand, for war. Never at home. Not with ourselves, not with one another, not with peoples or kingdoms. Not with God.

This King of Peace, walks seaside and calls our names. How are we to partner this Incarnate One? This Rex, at home in the form of humanity.

The Human Form  
The Human Face  
The Human Needing  
The Human Lonely  
The Human Naked, and Ashamed  
The Human Imprisoned, and Oppressed

*"O Come Desire of nations come and bind in one the hearts of all mankind."*

O What is our daily work of salvation? How to worship and adore this, Rex Gentium? O How to find and exult this king of nations? How, when he is born into the swarms of humanity, dressed as one of them?

The grit and grind of the everyday-ness of working out our Magnificat, is somehow in the lowliness of humanity. Somehow in the equity. This Jesus, crowned with thorns, marquee-ed as "King of the Jews," is just that, the human form, the suffering one, the lonely and the despised.

Maybe the work of our salvation song takes place from the inside out, one person at a time, the slow work, the slow boat, rowing with no wind, for peace on earth and love come down.

Or maybe it happens, all at once, with a twirl of "Glory Hallelujah!" of the everyday sort, going out in the knowledge that Christ is robed in all humanity. Maybe we skip to the tune of "Crown him with many crowns!" and we are careless with jewels and precious metals and we:

Crown the Royalty of the Poor Man  
The Queen Regnant of the Homeless Woman.  
The Veiled Glory of God in Hindu and Muslim,  
The Aura of the Holy One in your shared Household.  
He is not hidden. This king. This Rex Gentium.

*“Bid every strife and quarrel cease and fill the world with heaven’s  
peace.*



## Monday in Holy Week, March 26

RENEE STEPHENS

*“Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.” Luke 19: 47-48*

There’s always room for both joy and grief. For Jesus, the hosannas and palm leaves of Sunday give way to the difficult series of events that transpire for the rest of the week, culminating in his death and resurrection. The one who was there at the foundation of the world and who sustains all things through his powerful word commits to the incredibly difficult path of the cross. In these last days we see him take a stand for sacred space. We see him denounce those who seek after power. We see him teach with perfect grace and truth even amid mounting conspiracies. We see him break bread with his disciples and pray earnestly without ceasing. He shows us how to do all the hard things even while not giving up in doing all the good and necessary things. He knows that the grief and suffering of the cross is imminent and yet he devotes himself to prayer and teaching. And he is so effective that the people are “spellbound by what they heard.” As we walk these days of Holy Week, may we be called to embody with our entire being the mission of Christ: to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Even when the nights are long and the grief is heavy, there is still room for love.

## Tuesday in Holy Week, March 27

RENEE STEPHENS

*“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8:19-22*

One summer of my seminary career I spent in the Philippines as a “compassionary.” We didn’t call ourselves missionaries because we weren’t evangelizing. Our goal was not just to be the light of Christ but to offer tangible, sustainable solutions to improve the lives of the huge community that lived around the city garbage dump. People would go into the dump and scavenge for anything that could be repurposed including old food that they would re-ry and then eat or barter with. It was on our way there one day, as we stopped for lunch in the city, that my friend showed me how she always wrapped up her leftover food really well before she threw it away because she knew people might be digging it back out one day. Coming back to the states after this summer was one of the hardest adjustments of my life. We live lives of such luxury that even the poorest among us are well off comparatively. I always say it is so much easier to give of our money and resources, but it is a much bigger give to offer the space in our heart. To truly see our neighbors as ourselves, to love without bounds and without judgment. To truly seek for a just world and to see the image of God in every human being. And yet the whole creation waits in eager expectation for us.



## Wednesday in Holy Week, March 27

STEWART LUCAS

*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.*

*Hebrews 12:1-3*

If you haven't seen my cross collection on the wall in my office, please drop by some time. It's kind of gotten out of control. I started collecting them from our travels. Some are metal, some wood, some ceramic. The acolytes at my church in Annapolis, Maryland made the largest one that is the centerpiece. They all have stories. I wish I had written them all down.

But this one is still my favorite. My nephew Jack made it when he was about four, playing in my dad's workshop. It's just two scraps of wood with a couple of roofing nails barely holding it together. The plastic bar code is still stapled to the bottom of it. My nephew somehow just turned 24.

I love this cross for its simplicity and because Jack made it. I love it because it was made from leftovers. But I find it powerful because you can see all of the times he missed hitting the nail with the hammer. Every indent in the pine a reminder of missing the mark, and probably hitting a thumbnail too.

The Greek for sin is *amartía* which means "missing the mark." During this Holy Week we remember Jesus carrying his own cross and means of death. We remember that he did that so that we might be freed from our sin and born again. From the scraps of our lives, and the times we have missed the mark Jesus brings new life. But it's only Wednesday.



## Maundy Thursday, March 28

MEGAN ATKINSON

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35*

As we celebrate Maundy Thursday, we remember the profound events preceding Jesus' crucifixion. In John 13, we witness Jesus demonstrating extraordinary love and humility, washing His disciples' feet to exemplify selfless and sacrificial love.

The verse in focus, John 13:35, challenges us to reflect on the profound connection between love and discipleship. Jesus declares, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." These words not only serve as a hallmark of Christian identity but also provide a clear directive for action.

Washing the feet of His disciples wasn't merely a symbolic gesture; Jesus was showing a very practical demonstration of the love He was bringing.

Footwashing, reserved for the lowest servants in the ancient world, carried a profound message about the Kingdom of God. Love, a transformative force, compels us to serve others, mirroring Jesus' humility.

This Maundy Thursday, let's not only remember the events of that sacred evening but also heed the call to embody love in action. Like Jesus, who washed the feet of those around Him, may our love be practical, tangible, and transformative. As we contemplate John 13:35, may it serve as a reminder that our identity as disciples is intricately woven with the way we actively love one another.



## Good Friday, March 29

TAYLOR IRWIN

Today, we worship at a bare altar. Today, we tell the story of the Passion of our Lord. We honor the grief of his mother and friends. Anyone who saw this man, Jesus, who they thought was healing and hope, saw their hope trampled by religious intolerance and Roman imperialism. We often focus at this moment on the Resurrection, on knowing that death is not final or inevitable. But, in this past year, many of us have found ourselves on this side of the veil, facing the painful reality of this side of death.

So today, I want us to consider death through a liturgy around opening ourselves up to thoughts and conversations on death, to experience, grieve, and perhaps find solace in a reality we face.

Adapted From: *An Exhortation to Make Space for Speaking of Dying*

Let us now speak of dying,  
and let us speak without fear,  
for we have already died with Christ,  
and our lives are not our own.

Death is not a dark and hopeless word we must take pains to skirt  
or mention only in hushes whispers  
lest our conversations grow awkward and uncomfortable.

Rather, death is a present and unavoidable reality,  
and one though which we – the people of God –  
must learn to openly walk with one another.

Death is horrible and inevitable sorrow.

It is grief.

It is numb shock and raw pain  
weeping and ache.

And we will experience it as such.

Together we can face this death

Have we not all along been rehearsing Christ's death  
and his life in the sacrament of his communion?

In your pursuit of Christ, does life not demand  
a daily dying to your own self,

That final, brief sleep of death is

but the last laying down of all those lesser things,

Yes! Hate death!

Yes! Weep and grieve

But believe,

The veil is thinner than we know

And death is thinner still

Death is neither a grey void nor a dungeon class  
but a door.

And when Christ bids us pass through at last,  
we pass from life to life.

Amen.



## Holy Saturday, March 30

BILL MURRAY

Death is hard. Watching someone labor to breathe and stay when their body is ready to stop is terrible. Even staying in the room is something only a few people can handle. But that is all Friday's story.

Saturday is darkness.

Saturday is absence.

Saturday is the tomb.

Saturday is mourning.

Even watching death circle and draw near is easier than your heart searching for someone you love . . .  
who is not here.

It is so hard we fill it with tasks and busy work.

Mary Magdalene prepares ointments and prayers for a final farewell.

The disciples are locked in a room for fear of what comes next, preparing for the worst.

But sitting in the silence of loss is impossible.

And yet, that is where we are on Saturday.

Without hope. Without our friend. Without one to save us.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Learn more | [holynnocents.org/calendar](http://holynnocents.org/calendar)

## **Illuminated Pages with Rev. Ruth Pattison | February 21, 28, March 6**

Lenten Series on Wednesday Nights, RSVP online.

Participants will engage in the practice of Bible Study through Art Journaling. In Illuminated Pages you are the modern scribe, using art supplies right on the pages of scripture for the purpose of spiritual listening. Watercolors, charcoal sticks, acrylic paints, collage materials, inks, gesso, water-soluble crayons, and maybe even some needle and thread, will deepen your experience of contemplation. No 'art' experience necessary.

## **GLOW | February 28**

Let's GLOW for Lent. Kids ages PreK- 5th grade are invited to share an hour together this lent to discover the joy of prayer and giving.

## **Poptarts & Pajamas | March 10**

Don't let daylight savings bum you out. Bring the kids to church in their pajamas for a fun pop tart themed morning

## **Men's Dinner and a Book | March 12**

The next Men's Dinner and a Book is Tuesday, March 12 at 6:30 pm and the book is *The Appalachian Trail: A Biography* by Philip D'Anieri. Jay Croft is hosting. If you would like to attend, please contact Jeremy Webber at [jhwwebber@gmail.com](mailto:jhwwebber@gmail.com) for details. All men at Holy Innocents are included and invited.

## **Seder Meal | March 13**

Join Cantor Beth Schafer in celebrating Passover with food and song for the whole family. Designed to include the youngest and the oldest alike, a Seder recounts Israel's escape from Egypt recounted in Exodus. Registration is online.

## **Ventulett Gallery Opening: *Quietness Without Loneliness* | March 14**

Join us on for the next gallery opening, from 6:00-7:30 PM. Jenni Horne, a Southern painter, finds inspiration in the natural beauty of the South. She taught art for over 20 years before pursuing her passion for painting. Her work, characterized by bold colors and expressive brushstrokes, reflects the region's rich heritage. Horne, now a painting professor at the University of West Georgia, resides in Newnan, Georgia, where she shares her love of art and Southern culture with her family.

## **Women of HI: Sound Bath Meditation | March 21**

The Women of Holy Innocents have invited Sonia Thames from Wellness Vibe to lead a Sound Bath Meditation for our retreat. She will lead us using harmonious soothing sounds of crystal bowls, Himalayan bowls, gongs, solfeggio pipes, chimes, drums and other healing musical instruments. From 6:00 – 8:00 PM, bring a yoga mat! RSVP online.

## **Men of HI Retreat | April 19-21**

Mark your calendars for spiritual enrichment, fellowship, and renewal at our annual retreat, on April 19-21 at Lake Logan Episcopal Center, in Canton NC near the Blue Ridge Parkway. We will begin our time together Friday evening for dinner followed by a Saturday morning program, afternoon activities, dinner, and a bonfire Saturday night, and wrap up Sunday morning with discussion and Eucharist. Registration is online.

**Contact** John Harris | [harris4338@gmail.com](mailto:harris4338@gmail.com)

## **UPCOMING FORMATIONS**

Learn more | [holynnocents.org/formation](http://holynnocents.org/formation)

### **“I will with God’s help” March 3 – April 28**

These are the words with which we enter the Baptismal Covenant in the Episcopal Church. Companion with our confirmation candidates for this class series. See it as a refresher course and Reaffirm your own faith when our Bishop visits on May 5th. This class will explore all the questions to which we answer, “I will with God’s help,” at Baptism, Confirmation, and every Renewal of the Baptismal Covenant.

### **Ye Olde Hymn Sing | March 17**

Celebrate St. Patrick’s Day with mimosas and breakfast as we sing some familiar favorites...plus some fun St. Patty’s Day surprises. Will someone unlock the alleluias? Who will play the kazoo? Join us during formation for food, merriment, and song. We have raffles, guest solos on our spin-a-wheel, and good casual singing. As you enter Inglett Hall, please sign up for one of our raffles. This is a fundraiser event benefiting the Choir/Parish Scotland trip this summer.

### **Sabbath, Sabbaticals, and Renewal | May 12 & May 19**

“And on the 7th day, God rested from all the work that he had done. . .” From our weekly observance of rest on the sabbath, allowing a field to lie fallow, to sabbatical years and the Year of Jubilee, God has fashioned us and all creation, to need rest and relaxation. Let’s talk about the vulnerability and risk of taking rest, and consider ways to make it happen, as we seek to live a more wholehearted life.

# SAVE THE DATE

## **FEBRUARY 12**

Reading Connections

## **FEBRUARY 13**

Mardi Gras Pancake Supper

## **FEBRUARY 14**

Ash Wednesday  
7:00 AM, 12:15 PM, 6:00 PM

## **FEBRUARY 16**

Men of HI: Third Friday

## **FEBRUARY 18**

Formation: President's Day  
FOMA: Mosaic Quartet

## **FEBRUARY 21**

Illuminated Pages

## **FEBRUARY 23-25**

Parish Retreat

## **FEBRUARY 28**

GLOW

## **MARCH 3**

Formation: "I will with God's help."

## **MARCH 5**

Prayer Shawl

## **MARCH 6**

Illuminated Pages

## **MARCH 11**

Reading Connections

## **MARCH 10**

Poptarts & Pajamas  
Youth Group

## **MARCH 12**

Men's Dinner and a Book

## **MARCH 13**

Seder Meal

## **MARCH 14**

Ventulett Gallery Opening: "Quietness Without Loneliness"

## **MARCH 15**

Men of HI: Third Friday

## **MARCH 17**

Formation: Ye Olde Hymn Sing  
Youth Group  
Church of the Common Ground

## **MARCH 20**

Special Event with Temple Sinai

## **MARCH 21**

Women of HI: Sound Bath

## **MARCH 24**

Palm Sunday, Children's Choir  
Performance, Potluck Brunch

## **HOLY WEEK**

- March 25 | 6:00 PM Service
- March 26 | 6:00 PM Service
- March 27 | 6:00 PM Service
- Maundy Thursday | 6:00 PM Service
- Good Friday | 10:00 AM & 12:00 PM
- Easter Vigil | 6:00 PM Service
- Easter | 8:00 AM, 10:15 AM, 6:00 PM