

# ADVENT REFLECTIONS



2017

## December 3, 2017

*“You do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”*

*Mark 13:35-37*

In this parable Jesus is talking about his second coming – and apparently no one knows when that will be, not even him. He has given us the ultimate sacrifice, his life, for our sins and he taught us to live ethically and to love ourselves and one another, and treat everyone with respect. So, there is no other thing for us to do but to live up to it and to “watch” ourselves that we do it and remind one another to the same. So when he comes, we will not be caught off-guard, we will be ready to meet the Master who can gather us unto himself. And the world will be a better place with less hatred, less violence, less sin and more love and gratitude and caring.

## December 4, 2017

*“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah: “Here is your God!”*

*Isaiah 40:9*

### Sing Out Your Joy

Rejoice! Rejoice! Alleluia!

The crisp autumn air crackles with the news.

Rejoice! Our God is coming!

The trees have erupted in vivid colors,

Vibrant Yellows, Rose Blush, Deep Reds, Rust Colored Ambers,

Enveloped among the fall greens and browns.

All nature is heralding the gracious, wondrous,

Loving gift to come.

What was that?

A breeze just swirled around and then swished joyfully up.

Could it be an Angelic presence,  
making blessed preparations for the event?

Give thanks! Sing out!

Our God is coming! Lift up your voice!

Rejoice! Alleluia! Alleluia! Rejoice!

## December 5, 2017

*“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”*

*Isaiah 11:1*

A stump. What's left of a tree after it has been felled. The image of a tree stump is not one that usually speaks of new life. But out of this stump, out of the lineage of Jesse (David's father), a shoot will come up – new life will appear. And a fruitful branch will spring up even from the roots of this stump.

Thinking about the image of this tree stump brings to mind other images of where we find God in the world: the kingdom of God has been described as a hidden treasure in a field; as a mustard seed; as a housewife who searches high and low for one lost coin; as a shepherd who searches all over for one lost sheep. Common, ordinary, easily overlooked, humble images: just like the image of Christ's birth in a stable.

Don't assume there isn't life in something just because of its appearance – a lot can be happening underground, out of sight. Be alert to be able to see the divine all around us, in common, ordinary, humble, day-to-day things.

## December 6, 2017

*“..he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces.”*

*Isaiah 25:7-8*

What is this “shroud that is cast over all peoples?” The “sheet that is spread over all nations?” What is it of which Isaiah speaks? Is it sin...injustice...oppression...persecution...war? All of the above? Whatever it is, it has caused untold suffering throughout the world. Thankfully, we have a God who knows our affliction(s) and who will destroy the shroud, swallow up death and wipe away the tears of those who suffer. We have a God whose will it is to restore all things in Christ Jesus. This is the good news! This is our hope during the Advent season and for all time.

## December 7, 2017

*“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You must also be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”*

*James 5:7-8*

Did you know the word patience comes from the word “patior” which means to suffer? Patience does not come easily to most of us. Patience involves waiting. God’s sense of time does not always align with our own; instead it sometimes feels like God is silent - that God took a vacation while we weren’t looking. Let us remember that God’s silence doesn’t mean nothing is happening. In the patient waiting, we are being prepared for the road ahead. What may, at first, feel like an obstacle, an accident, a terrible turn of events, that brings us to tears, may very well be the ‘suffering’ necessary for transformation so that we are made ready to receive the joy promised to us. Let us continually learn to wait with hope.

**December 8, 2017**

*“As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”*

*Matthew 9:27*

Imagine two men, blind, possibly strangers, holding on to each other, pushing their way through the jaded crowds, stumbling over harsh objects placed in their path. Their leather sandals brushing the hot dust about, sharp stones lodged between tattered toes. The constant noise, and smells, all too familiar – yet one voice heard through the streets brought sight to their souls – one voice carried their steps closer to the hope they so desperately sought to be restored. Jesus.

Their background, prejudices, and lineage had no bearing on this moment – their preconceptions melted away. Wanting to be seen, forgiven and redeemed, through the eyes of the divine they believed him to be. Mercy would bring the atonement they so desperately hungered – to be one with God – to be whole. “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”

**December 9, 2017**

*“Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. The Lord will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you.”*

*Isaiah 30:19*

For many people the holiday season brings sadness and stress. Many times I have found myself in tears over what was done or not done in the past, sorrow for what is happening in the present, or fears for the future. I find myself crying out to God for answers and relief. I always get an answer, though not always the one I specifically ask for! Take heart: God hears your cry and will answer it in the way that is best for you.

December 10, 2017

*“In accordance with God’s promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.”*

*2 Peter 3:13-14*

The writer of 2nd Peter in verses prior to these describes a sudden arrival of the new order, the new creation. It is a promise made by Jesus that this present order of things will pass away and a kingdom of God’s righteousness will come into being. But it seems to me, the writer is describing how God is creating His new Kingdom with two very different approaches. One is the sudden and dramatic arrival of the new kingdom. The other is a quiet, often unnoticed transformation of the believer into the likeness of Christ. I think this is God purpose during this present age: to bring humans into the likeness and image of Christ. Each person is uniquely their own personality, but each grows into the compassion, the servom attitude, the desire to seek God’s presence and God’s will growing more and more within them until that “perfect day.” We have the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives to transform us into Jesus’ likeness. Praying for God’s will to be done is, I believe, asking how does he want us to change or to take action in order to transform ourselves and to resist the corruption of this age.

“Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth.”

**December 11, 2017**

*“The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

*Isaiah 35:10*

“. . . and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.”

There once was a Hebrew practice of anointing the head with oil and perfume in times of festivity and joy. An outward and visible sign upon the brow of the deep confidence and trust that God’s ‘got this’.

Joy brings the experience of something deeper than simply being happy.

Joy guides you into peace that passes all understanding.

Joy abides in deep trust of God’s eternal presence and grace.

Joy comes from deep down within - you can even be living sad and sorrowful emotions, yet be filled with joy.

Look forward, with hope, to the Lord’s return in your heart and give thanks.

**December 12, 2017**

*“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house will be set over all other mountains, raised high above the hills. All the nations will stream toward it and many people will go and say, “Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.*

*Isaiah 2:2-3*

Isaiah is looking forward to a new Jerusalem that will be the center of the world, where people of all nations will come to worship and for instruction. Other prophets have spoken of a new Jerusalem. Jesus spoke of a new creation. Making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or some other place may deepen our worship. But Jesus showed us and taught us that we do not need to travel to a faraway place. As he taught the Samaritan woman, the day is coming when you will not need to go to Jerusalem or any other place to worship. All we need is a private place to worship God in our hearts. Open your hearts to worship God this Advent season, so you can show others God’s love.

**December 13, 2017**

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

*Matthew 11:28-29*

We are often asked at this time of year to do more, be more: more decorating, more cooking, more shopping, more social engagements. And, even when surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the holidays, this seemingly happy season can remind us of the sadness that sometimes punctuates life: unfinished or unresolved quarrels, not-so-perfect families, and grief. The pressures of consumerism and others' curated images of joy can make the holiday season feel like a burden. Advent, however, can be a time of thoughtful waiting, with the same kind of joy and anticipation one can experience when waiting for a child. In fact, we are reminded of this on the third Sunday of Advent, or Gaudete. In these verses, we find Christ inviting us to the “peace which surpasses all understanding.” By sharing our burdens with God, we can find rest and comfort the Advent season, no matter how heavy they may seem. What burdens can let you go of today? What can you hand off to God? What can you do to let God in and find rest this season?

## December 14 2017

*“Truly, I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

*Matthew 11:11*

Why is John called great by Jesus? Has he a special talent or holiness not seen in other prophets? Perhaps he is called great by Jesus because he was chosen by God to prepare the world for the arrival of Christ. John was only one in a long line of prophets predicting the coming of the Messiah yet he was the only one to actually see him in person. John baptized with water as a sign of repentance and returning to God. His baptism did not afford salvation to the people. This was the mission of Jesus. He did this with his death and resurrection. John died before the events so did not see God's entire plan for Jesus. This makes the “least in the kingdom of heaven greater than he” because they and we as Christians know of his resurrection and understand what it means.

## December 15, 2017

*“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your good, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea.*

*Isaiah 48:17-18*

When reading this scripture the first time through, I felt doomed, full of remorse and a total failure. After I had studied and read it through in several different versions, I was able to see the reason it was chosen as an Advent reading. God gave us a pattern for living, a set of guidelines and rules. As humans, we will to fall short. God calls himself “Redeemer”, “Who saves you” , and “Repurchaser” in different translations. This is why we wait with anticipation during Advent for Christ's birth, because in his birth is the promise of redemption, salvation and repurchasing. With Jesus, we have the assurance of “Peace like a river.”

**December 16, 2017**

*“In a little while you will not see me anymore, and then a little while later you will see me.”*

*John 16:16*

This reminds me of another passage (1 Corinthians 13:12) “What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face.” It still is vague at best and alarming at worst. There was so much that Jesus said to his disciples that must have confused them. But I think we may know a little more in hind-sight than they did. I hope and long for the day when we see him face to face!!

**December 17, 2017**

*“Then Mary said, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.*

*Luke 1:38*

Behold: calm, confident, infused with Gabriel’s light, saying Yes. But, I wonder... What if she had said No? Had God given Gabriel a list of young women (and was Mary at the top, or lower down)? What would Jesus have been like if he had been born to someone else? God’s will would certainly have been fulfilled, but perhaps with a different flavor! And, I wonder... When have I said Yes when God wanted me to say No, or No instead of Yes?

God, as we prepare for the great mystery of Christmas, shine your Light in our lives, so that we may clearly see how we are called to do your work in the world.

**December 18, 2017**

*“The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.*

*Isaiah 7:14*

Would we believe it? Probably not. How much do we miss, or dismiss, by being closed to the possibility of something miraculous happening? Or maybe we are open to the idea, but only theoretically, in some other time, either far in the past or far in the future. But not in our own time, not in our mundane, day in and out time, not in our busyness and distraction. It seems too coarse, not special enough, not a place where we are likely to find something sacred, something miraculous. I can only imagine folks felt the same way two thousand years ago as they went about their own busyness, day in and day out. Father, help us to see that it is here and it is now, just as it has always been. Help us to see God with us. Help us to look.

**December 19, 2017**

*“Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.”*

*Psalms 33:2-4*

My dad was quite literally tone deaf. He could rock out with Louie Prima's ZOOMA ZOOMA BACCALA' as good as any Sicilian musician but any other song sounded, well, interesting. So, he pretty much kept his singing to his Italian favorites. But, at special times of the year, when he knew the words and the music was uplifting, he would belt out every verse of that particular song in Church. He was especially loud and animated during the Christmas Season and though it was difficult to stay on key standing next to him, his joyful noise was contagious. I think that is what this Psalm is saying to us. Praise Him with song and music. Off key as it may be, make a joyful noise to the Lord, so joyful that our praise is contagious to those around us.

## December 20, 2017

*“And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

*Luke 1:46-47*

This passage represents the fullness of Mary’s gratitude for being chosen as the mother of the world’s Savior. Mary rejoices in both soul and spirit projecting the power of the magnificent gift God has chosen her to offer mankind. Throughout the ages many composers have utilized the phrases of “Mary’s Song”, termed the “Magnificat”, in oratorios and other musical offerings i.e. evensong. Both JS Bach and CPE Bach used the Magnificat in their musical settings of the Mass. Like Mary, let us rejoice always in God’s great love through song and praise!

## December 21, 2017

*“Sing aloud, O Daughter of Zion; Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem.”*

*Zephaniah 3:14*

Unbounded Joy! Exultation!  
Something wondrous, beyond wondrous  
Something foretold, promised, comes to us.  
May our hearts rejoice and exult  
As we await again - and always,  
The birth of our Lord and Only Savior.

## December 22, 2017

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.”*

*Luke 1:68*

I have found in my life, I often need to be redeemed, sometimes several times a day. What I don't often do is take the time to praise the Lord for redeeming me, it seems that I only remember to reach out when I am in need. In this time of Advent, this time of waiting and preparation, it feels like I am getting a chance to step back and reflect. In that time of reflection I hope that I can remember to offer the Lord praise for all of the redemption he has given me thus far, and all the redemption that is yet to come. Come and join me in this period of reflection and redemption.

## December 23, 2017

*All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

*John 1:3-5*

I imagine that people have noticed the waxing and waning of light since the dawn of human awareness. We've noticed this phenomenon not just from day to night and back again but also as the seasons change from year to year. Since ancient times communities around the globe have observed these seasonal shifts with prayers and sacrifices, with festivals and fasts, because they needed to make spiritual and emotional sense of it all...especially the encroaching darkness of winter. I find the shift from daylight saving time back to standard time each November intensifies that experience when, from one day to the next, deep darkness comes a whole hour earlier! I feel it in my body and in my spirit like a kind of suffocating constriction. John writes that Jesus was not only present and active at creation, but also entered the creation

as the embodiment of life, the kind of life that continues to shine in the darkness and will never be overcome by it. We experience darkness in many ways: in the destructive forces of nature, in the destructive forces of human society, in the destructive forces of our own willfulness. So...in the depths of winter darkness we prepare to remember and celebrate the Light that will not be overcome by darkness of any kind, and I feel that suffocating constriction begin to ease in the hope that is the Light of the world. And I resolve, yet again, to be an agent of light in this darkened world.

**December 24, 2017**

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...”*

*Isaiah 9:2*

Sometimes life can be bleak. Our struggles take center stage. We wallow in the dark - and then, after patient waiting, we begin to see “a light at the end of the tunnel”. The dictionary describes that vision as “a long awaited indication that a period of hardship or adversity is nearing an end.” The light we see - even a very small glimpse of its rays - gives us hope - that despite whatever messes we are wrestling with, the light of God is with us guiding our eyes and our spirit always toward the light. On the eve of Christ’s birth, let us rejoice in the light of Christ given to us - the light that brings joy, hope and salvation into this world.

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