



Advent Devotional 2022

In Memory

Faith Susan Croker

October 14, 1931 – June 18, 2022

Dear Family and Friends of Bruton Parish,

It is our privilege as members of the Bruton Chapter of The Order of the Daughters of the King® to sponsor this 2022 Advent Devotional.

Many writers have volunteered to share their thoughts and insights on the Daily Office Readings. We are most thankful and grateful to both our new and returning contributors who have enthusiastically supported this endeavor.



A very special thank you to our Daughters Donna Marshall and Joan Whitla, who have facilitated this project in conjunction with our Communications Director, Hilary Cooley, and to Karen Gordon for the cover art. As always, we give thanks to our clergy for their participation and continued support of this project. We especially thank our Chaplain, The Rev. Lauren McDonald, for her encouragement and wise counsel.

This project was begun under the supervision of our dear Daughter Faith Croker, who left us in June to be with the One she served all her life. We pray that this devotional honors her memory and inspires others to faith, service, and evangelism, the Mission of the Daughters, which Faith embraced wholeheartedly.

We hope these reflections will help strengthen and deepen the devotional life of our readers during this Advent season.

For His Sake,

Judi Dorn
Pat Van Zandt
Chapter Co-Presidents

This year our writers have focused on the Gospel Lessons for the Daily Office Year One. Listings of the additional scripture readings for each day of Advent are included for your convenience.

Sunday, November 27

There is a moment in Holy Baptism, following the Baptism itself, when a candle is presented to a parent or Godparent. The following words are said, "Receive the light of Christ that when the bridegroom comes he might find you ready and waiting." These words reference the parable in the portion of the Gospel According to Matthew, assigned to this day.

The parable is a reminder of one pursuit of the Christian life. We are called to be ready. We could think of this as an admonition to be alert for Christ in every moment. We expect that through the work of the Spirit, Christ is always near.

There is another way to hear this parable. Every Sunday in the Eucharistic Prayer we say, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." So, we look for Christ in daily life, but we hope for the ultimate coming of Christ to culminate the eternal kingdom of God.

Throughout the history of the Church, Advent has been understood in two ways. We prepare for the Feast of the Incarnation, Christ's first coming, taking on human flesh. We also prepare for Christ's return. Advent is not about one or the other, but both.

This is the source of our hope. We don't simply look back and remember the birth of Jesus. We also look forward to the Savior's reign. Reflect upon this when we sing the great Advent hymn, "Lo, he comes, with clouds descending."

The Rev'd Chris Epperson

Psalms 146, 147, 111, 112, 113

Isaiah 1:1-9

2 Peter 3:1-10

Matthew 25:1-13

Monday, November 28

Advent is a season that emphasizes not only the joy of God's promise fulfilled, but also the sobering reason why God sent Christ. Celebrating Jesus's birth is a happy event full of anticipation, but to lose sight of the reason for that event—the restoration of a broken and dark world—would be to miss much of its power and meaning. Advent, then, like Lent, contains somber tones and a call for self-reflection.

In the Psalms and in Isaiah, the people call out to the Lord for help. God answers that if we trust in him and do what is right, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow”.

Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians because they turned to God from idols and were practicing works of faith, labors of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders because they did not acknowledge the divine message preached by John the Baptist and himself . . . turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life.

Therefore, may we not focus too heavily on the joy of Jesus's birth and its promise and forget that the reason for His coming was to save a lost and sinful people and to restore a broken world.

Joan Whitla

Psalms 1, 2, 3, 4, 7
Isaiah 1:10-20
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Luke 20:1-8

Tuesday, November 29

In today's reading from Luke, chief priests and scribes listen as Jesus teaches the people who have gathered in the temple. When questioned by this leadership, Jesus responds with a warning to those in authority, by telling the Parable of the Tenants. Vineyard tenants beat the landlord's slaves who come to collect part of the harvest, and ultimately kill the landlord's beloved son. When asked the meaning, Jesus replies with the words "*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*" *Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.*" Believe in and accept Jesus as your savior. Follow him. Be given the vineyard, care for it, and love the one who gave it. Or don't. Be broken to pieces instead. Be crushed. Be destroyed.

Not exactly a message that shouts holiday cheer as we open the seasonal greeting cards that are beginning to arrive. This is Advent. We are preparing for the birth of the baby Jesus and getting ready to joyfully welcome him into our lives. This parable might seem out of place, but it isn't.

We tend the vineyard every day. In Advent, we prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of the landlord's son, a baby who will grow up to teach, perform miracles, and lead. This son will be crucified for our sins and rise from the dead. He will ascend into heaven and be seated at God's right hand. We await the birth of our redeemer, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God. Build your life, and your faith, on him.

Donna Marshall

Psalms 5, 6, 10, 11

Isaiah 1:21-31

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Luke 20:9-18

Wednesday, November 30

As we have entered the Advent season, a time of light and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ, the words of the psalmist take on special meaning. There may not be a better tribute to the Holy Scriptures than the one provided in Psalm 119. Every verse in the psalm mentions and exalts the Word of God. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. The purpose of the psalm is to celebrate God's love and his instruction to his people. It is used in the Jewish tradition to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

The structure of the psalm is comprised of twenty-two stanzas, each starting with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There is tradition that King David used this psalm to teach his son Solomon, both the Hebrew alphabet and the alphabet "of the spiritual life." Psalm 119 is a prayer that includes many different elements, including prayers of praise, laments, vindication, obedience, and petitions for wisdom. The first twenty-four verses express the psalmist's firm belief in God's commandments, statutes, word, law, and testaments, while at the same time offering a fervent prayer for help to keep God's commandments and live a life of obedience to his laws.

There is no more beneficial activity than reflecting, pondering, and contemplating the Word of God. As a special Advent prayer or meditation, I like to think that it is an expression of our joy and gratitude for God's greatest gift of all, his son Jesus Christ.

Idanna Bowman

Psalms 119, 12, 13, 14
Isaiah 2:1-11
1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
Luke 20:19-26

Thursday, December 1

This passage from the Gospel of Luke has always confused me about the resurrection. It records the teaching of Jesus Christ in the temple in Jerusalem, especially his responses to questions raised by the Sadducees. Some questions are answered, but others are left to faith. When we die, we do not retain our qualities, and it is usually left unknown what happens when we die. Also, this passage teaches us never to question the Lord, for the human mind cannot fathom some of the Lord's wisdom.

We often hear people say that a husband and wife will be reunited in heaven. Will the people who were married on earth be married in the afterlife? Jesus said to the Sadducees (some who did not believe in the resurrection) that marriage is of this age and not of the age of the resurrection. Instead their relationship will be with God. For they will be God's children since they are children of the resurrection and will be as the angels of God in heaven. The resurrection is believed to unite the spirit with the body again, and the Church teaches that the body (flesh and bone) will be made whole.

During Advent, let us look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the one born to redeem all creation from sin and death.

Joyce E. Haines

Psalm 18

Isaiah 2:12-22

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Luke 20:27-40

Friday, December 2

The third and fourth verses of the twenty first chapter of Luke brought back memories over my many years. These verses have been referred to in Bible study groups, church retreats and stewardship literature. It is very thought provoking to consider what is enough. Being fortunate to have moved frequently, especially as an adult, I have been active in several churches throughout the United States. Reflecting over the years and on the different stages of my life, the phrase 'Time, Talent and Treasure' came immediately to mind. Each year, we prayerfully reflect on our monetary pledge to the Church. When I reflect on the other two words, time and talent, they have always been as important to me as the treasure. Other phrases that have frequently come to mind in my life are 'do unto others as they do unto you,' 'lend a helping hand,' and 'What would Jesus do?'

I have done many things involved with a Parish, from teaching Sunday School to serving on the Vestry. However, the phrase that has always guided me is, 'Pass it on.' Many years ago, I was the mother of two young children, a preschooler, and an infant. In arranging transportation schedules, two mothers living close by, suggested that they would share carpool duties, so I would not have to bundle up my infant. I did not know how to express my gratitude to them. They simply replied, 'Just pass it on.' Those mothers are still with me in spirit. Many situations have presented themselves over the years giving me the opportunity to help others in need. I hope those two mothers can still hear me when I say 'Pass it on.'

Sally Libby

Psalms 16, 17, 22

Isaiah 3:8-13

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Luke 20:41 - 21:4

Saturday, December 3

On my first reading of these passages, I thought "Uh-oh. Lots of violence and destruction here." Nation against nation, famines and plagues, smashing of heads, corpses heaped high. Wow! This reminds me of the evening news, filled with stories of wars and disasters, which we seem incapable of addressing. How can we maintain the hope that is Advent when despair is all around us?

Recently a new acquaintance told me a story about a miracle in her life. It was the first night of her visit to the home of a potential teacher and mentor. She took her dog out for a walk in the evening and came across a huge tree that was completely dead and leafless. All the other trees around it were in bloom so it was clear that this tree was barren. She works with wood and as a woman of faith, prayed for the tree and asked that it be given life again. I know what you may be thinking - why pray for a tree? But she was at a turning point in her own life, looking for a sign, and didn't question the impulse that moved her to pray. The next morning she looked out the window, and the tree was in bloom! Impossible? But Isaiah states that after the destruction of Zion "there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain." Psalm 116 begins "I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication, because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him." Perhaps seemingly impossible, but a miracle nonetheless.

Advent tells us that, despite death, illness, sorrow and all kinds of trouble, there is hope for us, for aren't we awaiting the birth of the One sent to save us? Thanks be to God!

Pat Van Zandt

Psalms 20, 21, 110, 116, 117

Isaiah 4:2-6

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Luke 21:5-19

Sunday, December 4

As we anticipate and remember the two elements of the Advent season, we can look to Peter for a way to do so. We are presented with three requirements for perseverance as Christians: to guard ourselves against spiritual error, to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to glorify Him.

How do we guard ourselves against spiritual error? Are there specific practices, prayers, chapters, or verses of scripture that we can turn to that will help us be steadfast in our efforts to guard ourselves against spiritual error?

What does it mean to grow in these two specific areas, grace, and knowledge? And, how might we do so? We do not gain more and more grace, as grace is something that is freely given to each of us not because we earn it and not because we work for it. By God's grace we can grow spiritually, strengthening our relationship with God and increasing our knowledge of God. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to get to know God better, to slow down, to be still, to listen.

Finally, this is an opportunity to glorify God, to give thanks and praise for all that God has done and will do in our lives and in the lives of our families, friends, communities, and the Church. Gratitude in action.

The three G's of perseverance, a recipe for endurance . . .
guard, grow and glorify.

The Ven. Jan M. Brown

Psalms 148, 149, 150, 114, 115

Isaiah 5:1-7

2 Peter 3:11-18

Luke 7:28-35

Monday, December 5

In this passage, Paul includes himself as he writes to his “brothers and sisters” that they do not need to know or be concerned about the day that the Lord will come like a “thief in the night”. While others are saying “Peace and safety,” destruction will come upon them suddenly and they will not escape. Paul goes on to admonish them that they are not in darkness so that this day should surprise them, but are children of the light and of the day and don’t belong to the night or to the darkness. Those who are asleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. He says to not be like the others but “let us be awake and sober . . . since we belong to the day.”

Paul speaks to us as brothers and sisters to be awake and sober, to put on faith, love, and the hope of salvation. God does not want us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation. He died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. He ends this passage by telling us to encourage one another and build each other up. How better to do this than through the community of our church and our relationships with one another? Who have you encouraged and built up, both in our church community and in the community around us?

Maridell Loomis

Psalms 25, 9, 15
Isaiah 5:8-12, 18-23
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Luke 21:20-28

Tuesday, December 6

Oh, my goodness . . . it is December 6th! I must start to think about Christmas shopping. Wait a minute . . . no . . . it is Advent. I must get myself ready for the birth of the Lord.

We must be at peace with ourselves and love all our neighbors. We must esteem all the righteous work of our neighbors also.

Think of what lies ahead for the baby boy lying in the manger. He accomplishes much for us, even before he dies for our sins. We should listen to all his parables and lessons.

"The mean man shall be brought down and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled."

When things go wrong, on whom do you call?

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him and I am helped . . . therefore my heart greatly rejoices and with song will I praise him."

Joan Sweet

Psalms 26, 28, 36, 39
Isaiah 5:13-17, 24-25
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Luke 21:29-38

Wednesday, December 7

I was ten years old on this day in 1941. The news broke that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. My parents, my older brother, and I spent the day by the radio listening to the news as hour by hour, terrible destruction took place.

Our next-door neighbor's brother was stationed at the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. We all waited for word about him and his family. Fortunately, all were safe. My father and two of our neighbors were doctors. My father was with Dupont, the company that made the tetraethyl lead that was vital for manufacturing munitions. Our young neighbors joined the Army. I remember going to church every Sunday and praying for their safety, and praying for the war to end. In 1945 the Japanese surrendered. We were at peace and our neighbors were home again.

We give thanks for the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice defending the blessing of freedom, and for those who now serve at home and abroad to keep peace on earth.

This Advent, as in December 1941, too many places in the world are anything but peaceful. Let us pray that people everywhere will have hope, give thanks, and rejoice. Like the shepherds keeping watch, we too will be told to fear not. Apprehension and uncertainty will give way to faith and assurance as we welcome the Prince of Peace.

Bobbi Smith

Psalm 38, 119
Isaiah 6:1-13
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
John 7:53 - 8:11

Thursday, December 8

We live in an unsettling world which is illustrated by the last few years. We have experienced Covid 19, mass shootings, riots, wars, runaway inflation, and handheld devices, to name a few. How do we cope with these?

We must seek God. As Psalm 37:7 says, *'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.'* We must quiet our hearts and seek God in silence and prayer.

Advent is the season in the church year for waiting, quiet, and meditation. Listen for God to speak to you in your silence. Come empty and wait. He is waiting for you.

Lord, let us meet you in the silence of Advent and wait for your love to come - Jesus Christ, your perfect gift to us.

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Prayer for Quiet Confidence - BCP

Sallie Wendt

Psalm 37
Isaiah 7:1-9
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Luke 22:1-13

Friday, December 9

I love the season of Advent, a time of joy, peace and love; a journey in joyous anticipation of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Then I think of Mary and Joseph and their journey . . . Mary, close to her time of delivery, riding on a donkey, under a blazing sun to Bethlehem, to be registered by order of Caesar Augustus. This could not have been an easy journey. No fancy hotels along the way to stop in for a hot shower, a meal, and a good night's sleep. Then arriving in Bethlehem, finding no place to stay, except for a stable. No comforts there, but creature comforts. I can't begin to imagine what Mary and Joseph went through, especially when the time came for Mary to give birth. No doctor, no medical team there, ready to assist in her delivery. But God was with her, bringing his son into the world. The end of their journey was the beginning of our life in Jesus Christ. A Star in the East, proclaiming the birth of our Savior and the Light of the World for all to see.

We all have journeys of one kind or another in our lives. I pray that all of our journeys are guided by the Star in the East, the babe in a manger ... the Light of the World.

Judi Dorn

Psalms 31, 35
Isaiah 7:10-25
2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 3:5
Luke 22:14-30

Saturday, December 10

And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.
2 Thessalonians 3:6

Paul is encouraging the people from Thessalonica to not tolerate idleness but to work for their keep. However, we don't earn points with God by working. God has already given us unending love and grace.

We work for others in order to give back some of the bounty God has given us. Selfless service allows us to follow the model that Christ demonstrated. We don't just take care of our family, friends, and neighbors. We reach out to those beyond our circle, stretching ourselves to show love to all people.

As we show love for others in large and small ways, we find love multiplying inside us. We can't outwork God or run out of love. We want to make ourselves a model for others. Think of someone you know who seems to shine from within. Let's model ourselves similarly. We usually do not realize who we share our light with.

Jeanne Harvey

Psalms 30, 32, 42, 43
Isaiah 8:1-15
2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
Luke 22:31-38

Sunday, December 11

The season of Advent is one rich with imagery, and thus, Advent is the season I most closely associate with our Holy Scriptures. From the Prophet Isaiah pointing the way to the little child who will lead us all, to John the Baptizer calling us to repent, and Mary singing her song of joy to God in great faith, Advent invites us to enter into our scriptural tradition anew and ponder how God speaks to us, even - and especially - today.

Among our scriptures appointed for today, it is the raw emotions of the psalms that speak to me most. From the opening verse of our first psalm appointed for this morning's prayers: *O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water* (Ps. 63:1).

Ponder these words for the literal emotions they express. When was the last time you felt such desperation for the presence of God? I am hard-pressed to recall such a time. Especially in a time of year that can be overwhelming in how busy we might find ourselves, there is no better time than now to proclaim, as the psalmist did millennia ago, that "my soul clings to you," (vs. 8) and recall that God's "loving-kindness is better than life itself" (vs. 3). This is no hyperbole; we are constantly called to place God first, entirely at the heart of all we are. And in this season when we eagerly await the coming of our living God, what better time to devote ourselves anew to holding God closely in our lives?

The Rev. Charlie Bauer

Psalms 63, 98, 103
Isaiah 13:6-13
Hebrews 12:18-29
John 3:22-30

Monday, December 12

In today's Gospel reading we learn that Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives. He tells his disciples to "pray that you will not fall into temptation." Jesus walks away from them, kneels down alone, and prays asking the Father, if willing, the cup of suffering be taken from him, yet not his will, but the Father's will be done. Jesus knows what is before him. He knows he is going to be arrested and betrayed by a kiss. He "prayed more earnestly,...with sweat like drops of blood."

Jesus returns from praying and finds his disciples sleeping. He tells them a second time to "pray that you will not fall into temptation." The disciples, along with a crowd, witness his arrest and betrayal and want to take matters into their own hands and strike with a sword. Jesus tells them no, and heals the servant's ear and rectifies the wrong they have done.

In a time of arrest and betrayal Jesus heals. In time of anguish and sorrow Jesus prays. Jesus is telling us we are to pray at all times, in all situations, and in all circumstances.

During this time of Advent let us pray, as Jesus has taught us, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done . . . " Amen.

Kathleen Rose

Psalms 41, 52, 44
Isaiah 8:16 - 9:1
2 Peter 1:1-11
Luke 22:39-53

Tuesday, December 13

Celebrating the birth of Jesus always brings us renewed hope. Readings voiced in a darkened old church, glowing with candlelight, give us the message that Christ the child is coming to be among us. Our hearts are eased and our faith encouraged. We are like little children, eager to hear the story and to believe.

Yet, day by ordinary day, away from the church's message about Christ's birth, we begin to slide away from our joyful, accepting belief. We forget that Jesus lived, was real, and told us who he was and why he was on earth.

We need prodding. We need proof.

Peter is determined to remind us of that powerful truth. The man Jesus lived, his message was real and attested to by his followers. They were not spouting myths: they actually heard and witnessed the majesty of Christ on earth and heard God's voice declaring, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

This message, this truth, is not the result of their own interpretation but comes directly from the Holy Spirit. Be assured and confirmed in your belief and accept it without any hesitation. Christ is real and with us right now and always.

Frederica Carson

Psalms 45, 47, 48
Isaiah 9:1-7
2 Peter 1:12-21
Luke 22:54-69

Wednesday, December 14

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark 1:4-8

What does it mean to be baptized? The Sacrament is more than water and words spoken by a priest, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

John proclaimed repentance for the forgiveness of sin and prepared the way for Christ – he called followers to acknowledge their sin, to make ready for the coming Messiah. John baptized with water, an outward symbol that conveyed forgiveness of sin. Jesus baptizes through his suffering and death on a cross.

Christian baptism today also symbolizes repentance, cleansing, and commitment. Each Easter, we renew our baptismal promises to reject Satan, evil, and sin. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant in which we are joined to Christ in His death and resurrection and by which we gain forgiveness of all our sins and God's promise of His eternal kingdom.

Rev. Karen Gordon

Psalms 119, 49, 53
Isaiah 9:8-17
2 Peter 2:1-10a
Mark 1:1-8

Thursday, December 15

"Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord." Oh, if only we as a nation could be able to adhere to that line from the thirty third Psalm. Continual prayer could certainly help, as well as time spent in meditation.

As I turned to the Second Letter of Peter, my experience visiting St. Peter's in the Woods, located in Northern Virginia, came to mind. A truck filled with sheep joined us in the parking lot at the church. The sheep were let out to 'mow' the surrounding hills of grass. I gave thanks to the Lord for the much-needed help the sheep provided, as I noticed that the sheep never tried to wander off, as they are apt to do.

As I read the Gospel in Matthew, John the Baptist engaging in name-calling, caused some concern for me. A number of Pharisees and Sadducees approached John to be baptized, but he lashed out at them, referring to them as "a brood of vipers." Thankfully John followed through with the water of repentance, telling the people ". . . after me comes one who is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry."

Thanks be to God for the many blessings enjoyed by us all, for lo these many years. Amen.

Cynthia Lee

Psalm 50, 59, 60, 33
Isaiah 9:18 - 10:4
2 Peter 2:10b-16
Matthew 3:1-12

Friday, December 16

Discouraged by dystopian Advent reflections, weary readers sought solace in a trending Tik Tok dance featuring three fake kings; Instagram reels starring robed Golden Retrievers guarding their flocks by night; and amusing screeds of Facebook elders denouncing the phrase "Happy Holidays."

During trying times, Advent still offers deliverance, a light in the darkness. What would daily living and giving the hope of the Advent story entail? How might doing so change your life?

Consider beginning a cyclical reading of the Gospels. Exchange cultural construct, literary device Jesus for the real Prince of Peace, and allow him to fill your heart and soul with hope, healing, and grace.

When you feel the world howling outside your window - all the anxiety, depression and injustice - disengage from the cyberworld and seek relationship with Jesus. He knows and loves the person behind your avatar.

Patricia Stack

Psalms 40, 54, 51
Isaiah 10:5-19
2 Peter 2:17-22
Matthew 11:2-15

Saturday, December 17

It is appropriate that Advent, like Lent, should contain some time for quiet. While in Lent this quiet is to be a solemn time of inward reflection, in Advent it seems more outward looking, more anticipatory. In a society determined to start the Christmas Season around Halloween, any time for quiet reflection is not easily found. We are so attuned to being talked to, talked at, talked over, talked around; to being entertained, that we may have lost the art of silence.

It is clear from today's lessons that those in biblical times also found themselves besieged by voices. Perhaps the voices were not quite so "in-your-face" as we allow them to be today by willingly carrying them in our pockets to be accessed again and again, but it seems that the words of others then could be just as relentless as they are today in their ability to demand attention, to entice, to threaten, to taunt, to scoff, as well as to praise and to sing.

How do we find the calm that enables us fully to anticipate the coming of the Christ child? Perhaps we can begin by setting aside just a few minutes each day. Turn off the devices. Pull out the earbuds. Find somewhere where our heartbeat can actually be heard. Reflect on our day, our encounters with others, on some small thing or event that made us glad. None of this needs to be earth-shaking – just give thought to someone or something that lightened up our corner of the world for a brief moment – and breathe a prayer of thanksgiving.

In this space, we may just hear that "voice of one crying out in the wilderness" and we can open our hearts and prepare to receive "the one who is coming." We can affirm our faith and commit to seeking Him in every person we meet – because He is there. As surely as Christmas is coming, He is there.

Mary Kafes

Psalms 55, 138, 139
Isaiah 10:20-27
Jude 17-25
Luke 3:1-9

Sunday, December 18

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish
but may have eternal life."*

John 3:16

One of the most well-known verses from Scripture, affirms our relationship with God. It reflects His unconditional love for His creation – *us*.

Love – a deep affection, tenderness, an unconditional relationship.

Believe – to accept, trust, and have faith in Jesus.

Jesus – the Lamb, Light of the World, Redeemer, and Savior.

Save – to free, rescue, recover, revive, and keep.

Eternal – forever, unending, undying, perpetual life.

Simple words that echo through our lives as reminders of God's love. Neither worldly objects nor good deeds can bring one closer to the Creator. Only through our belief in Jesus are we freed from sin and everlasting death.

"For God so loved the world..."

Rev. Karen Gordon

Psalms 24, 29, 8, 84
Isaiah 42:1-12
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 3:11-21

Monday, December 19

If you've ever experienced a power outage, you know how the glow from one tiny candle or flashlight can guide you through the darkness. You pray that the power will soon be restored. Suddenly, tiny lights appear in neighboring homes and you realize that you are not alone.

Many of us experience situations in our lives when we feel overcome with worry, anxiety, fear, sadness, or grief. We search for guidance and relief from the spiritual pain. We often forget that God is always with us ... our light in the darkness.

Light brings comfort, hope, and peace when everything seems filled with darkness and pain. John 5 verse 35 "John was a lamp that burned and gave light". Like John, many people bring God's light to others.

"There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is suffering, too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways."

Mother Teresa

May the light from our Advent candles guide us in seeking His call.

Carolyn Gaylord

Psalms 61, 62, 112, 115

Isaiah 11:1-9

Revelation 20:1-10

John 5:30-47

Tuesday, December 20

It's five more days until Christmas. Imagine that you didn't know when Christmas would come. It might be December 25. It might be much later. You only have the promise: Christmas will come. Wait for it. Expect it. Be ready for it. Imagine that went on day after day, week after week, month after month. Would you still believe that Christmas is coming?

Today we read about the marvelous account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Luke begins, prophets are saying that God had promised a future king, a future Messiah, a Son of King David, who would reign in righteousness. Christmas will come, but when? Today's readings are about joy, praise, and promises.

Luke 1:5-25 tells of a similar story leading to the birth of Jesus, with the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah with a message from God promising him and Elizabeth, his wife, a son named John. It sets the stage for the future birth of our Lord Jesus. We rejoice in God's gifts as did Zechariah and Elizabeth who thought that they would never enjoy the birth of their own child. God fills emptiness with hope and promise, where there is none. Only God can do that.

Michelle Brauer

Psalms 66, 67, 116, 117
Isaiah 11:10-16
Revelation 20:11 - 21:8
Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday, December 21

This summer, because of a medical emergency in the family, we had to end our summer vacation trip early and rush home. All is well now, but at the time we were quite worried. In the midst of canceling hotel reservations and getting things packed up for the return trip, the lyrics from an old John Lennon song kept running through my mind: "Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans."

The minor inconvenience of paring back our vacation plans seems so inconsequential now, especially when compared to what Mary experienced in today's Gospel reading. Mary, Luke tells us, was "deeply troubled" when the angel, Gabriel, appeared with the news that she was going to have a baby. "How can this be," she protested. No doubt her mind started to race: Joseph would be so furious; he would never forgive her; she would live the rest of her life in shame; her marriage was doomed. In my mind's eye I can see all of Mary's hopes and dreams come crashing down around her in sobs of despair. The plans Mary and Joseph had made certainly did not include parenting the Son of God!

Perhaps Lennon's lyrics might be better stated: "God's call is what happens when you are busy making other plans." We can pretend not to hear it; we can ignore it; or we can just say "no." In the end, Mary and Joseph said "yes" to the difficult, life changing detour God asked them to take. What about you and me? As Advent enters its final sprint toward the miracle of the Incarnation, listen. Can you hear it?

The Rev'd Ralph E. Haines III

Psalms 72, 111, 113

Isaiah 28:9-22

Revelation 21:9-21

Luke 1:26-38

Thursday, December 22

When Elizabeth is greeted by Mary her unborn child leaps in her womb and she exclaims in a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!" Upon hearing this exaltation Mary is overtaken with a spirit of praise and says, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." We know this as the opening sentence of the Magnificat, a beautiful hymn of praise that rejoices in God, acknowledges his grace, and declares victory over the proud and powerful.

Advent is a time of anticipation and hope, because God, " . . . has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." And, like Mary, we are to rejoice, celebrate and commemorate the coming of Jesus, not only at his birth, but also to His triumphant return.

Let us be faithful like Mary in our response to God's calling in our lives, especially during this time of Advent, and give God all thanks and praise, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Amen.

Kathleen Rose

Psalms 80, 146, 147
Isaiah 29:13-24
Revelation 21:22 - 22:5
Luke 1:39-48a(48b-56)

Friday, December 23

When I was younger Advent was the season when the church seemed to come alive. We started singing some of my favorite hymns reserved to four Sundays a year, there were mid-week activities with my church friends, and our rector walked around singing "Advent Bells" to the tune of Jingle Bells. Hope and high spirits filled the air.

Now that level of fresh excitement is muted. I still welcome the Advent hymns and enjoy the sweet energy of young parishioners. But the inescapable daily news dampens one's spirit.

Turning to the scriptures offers comfort and wisdom. Isaiah speaks from his own time of discord and brings the message of hope: "Your eyes will see the king in his beauty
and view a land that stretches afar." (Isaiah 33:1)

Today I will focus on this message of Hope. This is the great expectation of Advent. Isaiah encourages us to not despair: "the Lord is our King; it he who will save us."

Join me as we look forward in faith to the promise of the birth of our Lord.

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)

Alice Oates

Psalms 93, 96, 148, 150
Isaiah 33:17-22
Revelation 22:6-11, 18-20
Luke 1:57-66

Saturday, December 24

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.' Isaiah 35:4

Today is Christmas Eve. What has been done has been done. What has not been done has not been done. Let it be. Now is the time to say to our fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God." Here is our God, squirming and wriggling in vulnerable human flesh. Here is our God, among us as a baby, completely dependent on human parents for sustenance. Here is our God, upending everything we expect so that even the desert will blossom and rejoice, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water. Here is our God, Creator of the Universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Here is our God, come near to be with us.

We do not need to fear; God is with us. Take a moment today to remind yourself – Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. Of all the things that are going on, this is the most important. God is near. God is here. God is always doing a new thing, making a way where there is no way, providing nourishment to all who hunger and living water to all who thirst. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel has come.

The Rev. Lauren McDonald

Psalms 45, 46
Isaiah 35:1-10
Revelation 22:12-17, 21
Luke 1:67-80

