



*Waiting in  
Joyful  
Expectation*

*Advent  
&  
Christmas*

*Scripture Reflections 2010*

*The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

# *Advent & Christmas Scripture Reflections 2010*



Dear friends of the Cathedral,

The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist is deeply committed to assisting all parishioners grow in their commitment to follow Christ as his disciples. We believe that this is the purpose for which we exist. We also acknowledge that the practice of daily prayer and reflection on the Scriptures and the sharing of our faith with others are essential disciplines for all of us who seek to follow the Lord more fully.

With that in mind, we have once again prepared these daily meditations on the Sacred Scriptures of each day of the Advent season. These meditations have been prepared by fellow parishioners as a way of sharing their faith with all of us.

I hope that this booklet and the Scripture reflections it contains will aid you in your conversations with the Lord during this holy season and enable you to share your faith more fully with others. I offer my deep gratitude to all the parishioners who, in these pages, share their faith and understanding with us and to our Pastoral Associate, Pat Wisialowski who coordinated this prayer project. If you find this spiritual resource helpful, there is an envelope enclosed with this reflection booklet for you to express your appreciation.

May your Advent and Christmas time be blessed with a deeper awareness of God's love for you as reflected in the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us!!

With my love,  
Father Carl

## 28 NOVEMBER - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 2:1-5 / ROM 13:11-14 / MT 24:37-44

*“He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” Isaiah 2:4*

Isaiah wrote these hopeful words, describing the messianic destiny of Judah, in the second half of the eighth century B.C. He described the transformation or conversion of a sinful kingdom to one of universal and everlasting peace.

Did the faithful who heard Isaiah’s vision then, think that he was naive, idealistic or even out of his mind?

I recall in my own life, when my husband Bob and I attended a fundraising meeting for Milwaukee High School of the Arts, the facilitator spoke of another conversion. He asked, “What would happen if schools had all the money they needed and the military had to hold a bake sale?” At which point, barely audible, my dear husband said, “We’d all be speaking Chinese.”

That’s just it. What about the “real” world? Is Isaiah’s vision realistic? It hasn’t happened yet. Why not? I don’t have to look farther than my own heart to figure that out. What am I thinking when a car cuts me off in traffic or I feel betrayed by someone close to me? Let’s just say it’s not pretty. My impulse to retaliate needs to be transformed. How does that happen?

Isaiah’s vision is actually God’s vision. It takes God’s work within us (individuals and nations alike) to bring about a change of heart, a conversion. And that ongoing conversion is embodied in one action – to love. If we really understood, we would understand that love is the only “weapon” that truly leads to a change of heart.

Advent begins today with a vision of a healed alternative for the world. As transformed disciples we are being asked to make our way to where the presence of God can be found and join God in God’s good work. Stay vigilant, alert, hopeful, and, yes, a little out of our minds and into the mind of God as we wait for the embodiment of love on Christmas Day.

- ★ What in you needs to be transformed or converted?
- ★ What action can you take to bring about a change of heart in others?

Sharon Riley

*“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof...”*

*Matthew 8:8*

Sometimes in our lives, we start to think we’re really hot stuff. Whether it’s because of a prestigious job or an amount of money or the upper hand on someone else, we think we’re the masters of our own domain. We protect ourselves from harm; we provide ourselves with life’s comforts; we can tell others what to do.

But today, we are reminded that all of this is an illusion. God is the true protector; God is the true provider; God is the true commander. Isaiah gives us a dramatic sense of the sheer expanse of Jesus’ impact on our lives, saying “For over all, the Lord’s glory will be shelter and protection.” We must be humble and be comforted by the umbrella that God has opened above us. No matter how tumultuous the weather, our faith in Jesus always gives us rest from the storm.

This humbleness should also carry into the things in life we try to control. At some point, all of us have gotten on a bit of a power trip. Or maybe we’ve tried to manipulate others to get what we want in our personal lives. Some of us have jobs that require us to manage those farther down on the professional ladder. Through all of this, we have to recognize that God is really in charge. We must treat those over whom we hold status with respect and dignity, just as Jesus does with us. It is only with humility and admiration of God’s healing mercy that He might say to us, “in no one...have I found such faith.”

- ★ How has God sheltered me from harm?
- ★ Have I tried to take charge of God’s will?

Jon Helm

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!”*

Sometimes scripture admonishes us to mend our ways. Sometimes scripture tells us to be more grateful for all of our blessings. Sometimes we are told to love one another. But today we are to be the messengers that start “walking.”

Paul is going to visit the Church in Rome, stay with them for a while, and with their support go on to Spain to share the message: “all who call upon God will be saved.” Then he asks, “How can they (in Spain) call to him for help if they do not believe? How can they believe if they have never heard the message? How can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? How can the message be proclaimed if the messenger is not sent out?”

Then Matthew tells of Jesus’ calling of Peter, Andrew and James and John. “Jesus WALKED along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers...he walked on and saw two other brothers...”

We know today’s lesson is a call for us to share the good news. This makes us ponder – what is the message that I am to proclaim? How will I know what to do?

Again, Scripture says, “God’s message is on your lips and in your heart.”

So listen to your heart, in prayer ask the question about your message today, and then get on your feet and start walking.

- ★ Have you, in prayer, pondered what your actions should be today?
- ★ Have you noted some action that can express to another person your care, your concern for their well being?
- ★ Have you thought “how beautiful” your feet will be when you are the messenger with good news?

John and Lois Ahlhauser

*“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines...” Isaiah 25:6*

If Christmas is the time of joyous feasting and celebration referenced in the passage from Isaiah, then Advent is when we need to prepare for the feast. How, then, should we prepare?

Perhaps a good place to start is trying to think about how our veil of secularism and human folly hinders our ability to both see and live God’s message to us. We can look beyond our day to day needs and wants and look for ways in which we can realize God’s love for us in our daily lives. A kind word to a loved one or a stranger, a day of volunteering to help those less fortunate, a call to someone distant and alone, or an extra few moments of the day devoted to prayer. As we give of ourselves “the veil that veils all peoples” can begin to be dismantled in preparation for the Lord’s coming.

What is interesting about these thoughts is the way they also connect with Matthew’s account of Jesus’ healing then feeding of the great crowd that had come to him. Just as the disciples asked Jesus how they could possibly feed such a crowd, we often ask ourselves how we can possibly muster the time, energy and treasure necessary to live God’s word. This is all the more true in times like now with seemingly never-ending anxiety about politics, job security, and global strife. But Jesus made much out of little and the crowd “... all ate and were satisfied.”

During this Advent season I hope to prepare for Christ’s coming by reflecting on what I can do to make much out of little. The call to the shut-in or sick; helping prepare a warm meal for someone who would otherwise go without; extra time each day devoted to prayer. Each is a way to make much from little, to satisfy the spiritual needs of both myself and others.

- ★ How will I prepare during Advent for the celebration of Christ’s coming at Christmas?
- ★ How can I follow Jesus’ example of providing much out of little?
- ★ How does the veil of which Isaiah speaks distort my view of fulfilling God’s word?

Joe Wilson

*“Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just, one that keeps faith.” Isaiah 26:2*

When I was in 7th grade, our gym class had a competition to build the best human pyramid. Since I was the smallest and lightest member of my team, I was chosen to be the one at the top of our pyramid. Although I wasn't too happy about being chosen for the top (I am afraid of heights), I reluctantly agreed to do it. I swallowed my fear and put my faith in the strong foundation that my teammates would provide for me and trusted that they would be able to hold me up. They did hold me up and our team succeeded in building a terrific pyramid!

Just as I had to have faith and trust in my teammates, our readings today remind us to put our trust and faith in God. Isaiah reminds us to “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord is an eternal rock.” And Jesus tells us that putting our faith in Him and following His Word is like building a house on strong rock, rather than on sand.

Our faith in the Lord and following His teachings provides us with a strong foundation upon which to build our lives. And our faith community helps strengthen that foundation through our love and support of each other in weathering the difficult times in our lives.

How blessed we are to have the love and support of the Lord and each other as we celebrate this Advent season!

- ★ How can I strengthen my faith foundation this Advent season?
- ★ In what ways can I provide love and support to others to help strengthen them?

Anne Marie Bula

*“Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” Matthew 9:28-29*

In today’s Gospel, we read Matthew’s matter-of-fact telling of Jesus healing two blind men. They seek mercy; He asks if they believe he can heal them; and he performs the miracle. The account is brief, but it’s layered with themes that resonate in our Advent preparations.

First, the account is powerful confirmation that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. Amid all the many miracles Jesus performed in Galilee, this is the first time he heals the blind. He heals a mute person in the passage immediately following today’s reading. There’s no coincidence here – these were among the very acts the prophets proclaimed the Messiah would perform, and Jesus was performing them. There was great anticipation throughout the land that the Messianic age was approaching. Advent brings that same mounting anticipation today, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth and await his triumphant return.

Matthew’s account also teaches us about the steadfast faith of the blind men. They respond so confidently, “Yes, Lord” when he asks if they believed in his healing power. Yet they couldn’t see for themselves that he was the son of God. They believed without evidence that they themselves could see. Talk about blind faith! Theirs is the very essence of faith – the unwavering belief in something that hasn’t yet been proven true. That’s the faith we celebrate this Advent season. It’s the faith that God is in our midst, in all things, in the good and the bad, a powerful and potent force in our post-modern lives.

- ★ Is anything interfering with your anticipation this Advent season? How will you reconcile it?
- ★ Do you have the same blind faith as the two blind men? Why or why not?

Mark Diestelmeier

## 4 DECEMBER - ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS

Is 30:19-21, 23-26 / Mt 9:35—10:1, 5-8

*“He will be gracious to you when you cry out, as soon as he hears he will answer you.” Isaiah 30:19*

The readings today speak of God’s consolation of those who weep, Christ’s healing of every disease, and his giving the twelve disciples the mission of also curing and casting out demons. In a nutshell, the good news of the kingdom is: “Jesus saves.” He saves us from our mental distress because he wipes away our tears caused by our various afflictions; he saves us from our physical distress of illness and disease. He forgives our sin. He makes us whole in mind, body, and spirit. He knows our individual circumstances and has compassion on us where we really are and how we really are, not how we would wish to be. Our task is to be transparent, to strip aside every facade and mask in order to be present to Jesus as we really are, so that healing touch and compassion can reach us where we really are and transform us.

The reading from Isaiah speaks of seeing The Teacher and Matthew’s gospel of Jesus teaching. The teaching in both readings occurs through action as much by word. We learn that Jesus saves from being consoled and healed, not from hearing some long discourse. Once we experience that saving touch, our mission is to pass it on, to pay it forward, by going and doing likewise...consoling those who weep, living lives of compassion, curing whatever ills we encounter to the best of our abilities. In doing this, The Teacher is no longer hidden, but made manifest in the lives of his disciples...in us.

- ★ What sorrows or illness of mind, body, or spirit do I want to present to Jesus’s healing touch?
- ★ How can I “pay forward” all the good things the Lord has done for me?

Susan K. Wood, SCL

## 5 DECEMBER - SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 11:1-10/ ROM 15:4-9 / MT 3:1-12

*“For whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4*

The days dip deeper into the darkness of winter, a season in which we ask how are we left in this world. We feel the cold and gloom; we know the crisp and clear. There is in our humanity an innate sense of endurance. And, in Saint Paul’s happily frequent word, encouragement – both nature and revelation. So, “We might have hope.”

The Church lays out for us four selections, previously written of course: Isaiah, a Psalm, Romans, and Matthew. All laid out are marvelous to resume again another go-around in our public life [liturgy]in the Lord Jesus.

The wilderness of John’s Judean desert is not unlike the barrenness of a Wisconsin winter. Each alludes to the abyss or chaos in Genesis. After all, it is over this that the mighty wind swept. From this point on, the kingdom of heaven is inaugurated. Then in Judea, now in Wisconsin. At anytime at any place a voice, The Voice is heard.

Speaking of desolation, we note the stump in Isaiah and the ax poised by John’s prophecy. A bud blossoms; repentance replies. And Advent arrives again. There is no getting away from it. God comes into our world. It’s God’s world.

Our God is the God of endurance and of encouragement. He made us in His image and likeness so that we may be perfected as His Son is perfect. Let us bask in the fire of His Spirit that we may warm to His presence now and through all our days.

- ★ Where does Scripture place in my life?
- ★ How does Scripture play in my life?
- ★ Where does liturgy place in my life?
- ★ How does liturgy play in my life?

Dennis M. Callies

## 6 DECEMBER - ST. NICHOLAS

Is 35:1-10 / Lk 5:17-26

Saint Nicholas lived a life of charity and love and was mindful of the needs of others. He showed great kindness and generosity to those in distress. He is the patron saint of many causes including: Patron Saint of Children, Patron Saint of Sailors, Patron Saint of Shoppers, Patron Saint of Travelers, and Patron Saint of Prisoners and Wrongly Condemned.

As Advent begins and we get ready for Christmas, the shopping often begins, too. Let us look at St. Nicholas as an example to focus on giving more than on receiving and to keeping it simple – simple enough to fit in a shoe or a stocking. One gift could be the gift of time. Perhaps you could give a note that says, “The gift I give you is an hour each Saturday to be with you and do whatever you want to do.” Be creative. Let us keep our focus on Jesus.

“Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man” (Luke 5:17-26)

Jesus heals a paralyzed man and says “your sins are forgiven.”

Being able to get up and walk and having one’s sins forgiven both are only possible with God’s help. The paralyzed man was completely helpless. His friends helped carry him on the bed to help him get to Jesus. This must not have been easy. His friends demonstrated their faith. People were amazed at this miracle.

Forgiveness: What do we need to ask to be forgiven for? Who do we need to forgive?

Dare to do the difficult: It isn’t easy to bring someone to Jesus. It can be difficult, but worth the effort. How can we bring other “helpless” people to Jesus? And, how do we follow Jesus?

“The Road to Holiness” (Isaiah 35:1-10)

This is the path we need to follow to get to God. It is a marvelous place where the “blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy....They will be happy forever, forever free from sorrow and grief.”

To be a good follower of Christ we need to improve our mind, body and soul.

- ★ What bad habits do we have that could be keeping us from being close to God?
- ★ How can we improve ourselves?

Marie Gilpatric

## 7 DECEMBER - ST. AMBROSE

Is 40:1-11 / Mt 18:12-14

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Ambrose, one of the great Latin Doctors of the Church. St. Ambrose came to the church reluctantly, he was actually coerced by the Emperor Gratian to leave his rich estate and public life as a successful lawyer to become bishop of Milan. In what seems a total reversal of roles, Ambrose gave his property to the poor and focused on learning Scripture and theology. Later in his ministry, faced with paying a ransom for captives captured by the Goths, Ambrose used gold vessels belonging to the church to obtain their release. He said, "It is a better thing to save souls for the Lord than to save treasures." Ambrose would go on to save souls in the church throughout his life as a bishop.

In both of today's readings we see both Isaiah and Matthew use the figure of a shepherd caring for his sheep, "He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes." (Isaiah 40:11), even to the point that not one should be lost, "...it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost." (Matthew 18:14)

Sometimes I feel lost, sometimes I worry as I watch my mother struggle with dementia that she is "lost" and there isn't anything I can do to help her. It brings some comfort to know that the Lord cares so much for each of his children that none will be left alone. There are times too when I worry about friends who have lost their way, who have left the church or become inactive. I know what it's like to be lost, I found my way back. For me the calling was from within, the Lord wouldn't let me stay lost. I heard the Shepherd calling my name.

- ★ When we know someone who appears to be lost are we an instrument of the Shepherd to help them find their way back?
- ★ Would we use our treasure to ransom the lost, captive souls around us?

Thom Yockey

## 8 DECEMBER - THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

GN 3:9-15, 20 / EPH 1:3-6, 11-12 / LK 1:26-38

*“In love he destined us... so that we might exist for the praise of his glory...” Ephesians 1: 11-12*

Today’s First Reading and the Gospel describe two pivotal moments in our salvation history. First we hear the story of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve and God’s promise of a future redemption. Then in the Gospel, the story is told of the Angel’s visit to Mary as God’s promises are about to be fulfilled through her as the mother of Jesus. In between we have the reading from Ephesians. In this reading we are reminded that God has chosen us in Jesus Christ, “before the foundation of the world” (1:4). It is our destiny to be God’s adopted sons and daughters and it is God’s purpose for us that we exist to praise God for his glory.

We find it easy to praise God when we enjoy the wonders of creation, when surprising and beautiful things happen in our lives. How many of us have exclaimed: “Praise God!” after we have come through a trying and difficult ordeal? Praise comes easily then. Yet there are also those times in our lives when hymns of praise come to us less quickly. Those times when we, like Mary in today’s Gospel, are confused, troubled or facing what seems to be an impossible situation. It is especially during the challenging times that we must come back to today’s second reading and remember that each of us has been chosen by God, in love, to live our entire lives in praise of his glory. No small order but one made possible by our faith in Jesus Christ.

- ★ In your own life, when was the easiest time to give God praise? When was the most difficult?
- ★ In what ways could you make all our daily activities an expression of praise?
- ★ What is your favorite hymn of praise? Could you think of it as the “theme song” for your entire life?

Sallyanne Hassert

*“For I am the LORD, your GOD, who grasp your right hand;  
It is I who say to you, ‘Fear Not, I will help you.’ ”*

*Isaiah 41: 13-20*

As I reflect on today’s reading, I once again hear God’s message to us to “not be afraid.” Fear not, for I will help you, we are being told. Sacred Scripture tells us that God has a firm grip on our lives and our Lord is not going to let go.

We are also reminded that we are of God’s creation. Because of this (and our Lord’s love for us), God will transform us and smooth out the “rough mountains.” As I ponder this reality, I think of the trust exercise of closing your eyes and falling backwards. In this exercise we must trust that someone will be there to catch us, watching out for our well-being. The Lord, with all unyielding love has a firm grip and will be right there, calling us to trust in him in good times and in bad as we journey in faith.

I have too often struggled, worried, or been afraid that the mountain was too high, the task too tough, or my cross too much to bear. But what I must remember is that all I need to do is “fear not,” for our Lord is right there holding us up, as we journey in faith.

- ★ How often do we struggle on our own?
- ★ Do we fear not, and let the Lord help us, so others may see God’s goodness?
- ★ As God’s creation, do we understand His love for us?

Craig Cornelius

*“To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.’ “ Matthew 11:16-17*

Reading today’s gospel I can hear my mother’s voice in my head. “Sometimes you can’t win for losin’.” We can feel Jesus’ frustration with the crowds when like children they could not be satisfied. Although they longed to see the Messiah, they could not or would not see the prophets in their midst. John the Baptist was rejected for his life of penance and privation and seen as insane. Jesus, on the other hand, in his association with everyday people of all kinds was accused of gluttony and drunkenness. It seems as if every excuse was used to explain why each could not be the Messiah even if both views contradict each other.

I write this at a time of an increasingly negative, expensive and seemingly endless campaign season and see strong correlations to this gospel. We choose a particular party or a favorite candidate and those people who disagree with us can’t just simply have different priorities or viewpoints—they must be demonized as stupid or evil or worse. The stronger we feel about an issue or a candidate, the less likely we are to take the time to listen and the more likely we are to leap in defense of our beliefs.

At the same time, I watched as one by one each of those thirty-three miners trapped underground for so many weeks were brought back to earth. I marveled at the cooperation, the clarity of purpose, the wisdom that was necessary to bring about that miraculous outcome. What a remarkable image to carry with me during Advent, a season of waiting, patience and humility.

- ★ What preconceptions keep us from recognizing God in our midst?
- ★ This Advent how can we have eyes to recognize the prophets around us?

Teresa Flaherty

*"I tell you, Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished."  
Matthew 17:12*

Today's reading from Sirach shows what a hero Elijah was to the people of Israel. They knew it was prophesied he would return, and they couldn't wait! Despite their anticipation, when Elijah did return in the person of John the Baptist, they missed it. Why? John the Baptist didn't fit their idea of Elijah. No, when THEIR Elijah returned, he and the Messiah would establish a new kingdom. They would be conquerors! What they failed to see was this new kingdom was a heavenly kingdom. Jesus did conquer – not the Romans, but sin and death!

For us, Advent is also a time of great anticipation. We are constantly reminded how many shopping days are left until Christmas. Advent calendars and wreaths mark the time until we celebrate the blessed birth of Jesus. We can't let all the excitement blind us to what's going on around us. Just because we are preparing to celebrate His birth, it doesn't mean Jesus has gone away for Advent. We are called to see Jesus in everyone! There are always people in our lives who are hurting physically, emotionally and spiritually. When we take the time to help them, we are truly celebrating the reason for the season! We also have to get rid of our preconceived notions. It's great to buy a toy for a needy child, or donate food for the less fortunate, but it's also easy. It's much harder to help someone who looks dirty, different or even dangerous. Yet, these were exactly the people Jesus helped, and we are called to help.

- ★ Are your preparations for the Christmas holiday getting in the way of being Christ's disciple in the world?
- ★ Do you ignore the needs of others because they don't fit YOUR idea of what a child of God looks like?

Jay Matz

## 12 DECEMBER - THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

IS 35:1-6, 10 / JAS 5:7-10 / MT 11:2-11

*“They will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.” Isaiah 35: 10*

“They will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.” A promise we each hope to see fulfilled. So, we live our lives waiting in anticipation, our “Advent.” We try to live remembering that our lives are called to reflect Jesus, the lives of many disciples, the gospels and the Beatitudes. “He became what we are that He might make us what He is.” (St. Athanasius)

Advent is a time of waiting, anticipation, a time of unknowns. As Catholics we refer to Advent according to the liturgical calendar, four weeks in which we prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. Advent is a time of waiting that extends beyond four weeks. It is a season called life in which we pray, take time to reaffirm our faith in the belief that we need Christ in our lives. We deepen our understanding and relationship with Him, with the Holy Spirit. This relationship strengthens and comforts us, our daily lives – as well as the lives of others as we live a life of discipleship. “For the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink, but in justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14: 17)

A call to discipleship is one of the choices we are offered on Earth. It is closely related to this joyful meeting with God. In his gospel Matthew shares the conversation between Jesus and his disciples, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” (Matthew 10: 40) Discipleship asks much of us on a daily basis. The difficulties, inequities, temptations, losses and crises of life challenge each of us often weakening our ability to remember the call to and conditions of discipleship. In these moments we need to recall the words, “Cast all your worries upon Him because He calls for you...the God of all grace...will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” (James 5: 7-10)

- ★ What can you do for others in daily life to help foster hope?
- ★ Are you able to find God in your daily life? If not, what can you do to connect with Him?

Micki Toal-Holly

## 13 DECEMBER - ST. LUCY

NM 24:2-7, 15-17 / MT 21:23-27

Lucy's Latin name Lucia shares a root (luc-) with the Latin word for light, lux ~

As my good fortune has it, I am married to a Lucy, so I have some knowledge of this strong-willed saint. St. Lucy is the Patron Saint of the Blind and is often pictured holding a tray with her eyes on it.

My mother, Phyllis, was blind from the age of 7 until 11. Her blindness was thought at the time to be caused by the anesthetic used when she had her tonsils removed. There were no known remedies then for this kind of blindness. It was thought that she would be blind her whole life. She and her whole family prayed to St. Lucy daily for a cure. In typical miracle fashion she awoke on Christmas morning and could see. The doctors had no medical explanation for her sight returning after four years.

During her four years of blindness my mother learned Braille and could move around her home as long as no one moved the furniture. She was home-schooled and had little contact with the outside world. When her sight was returned she had a great appreciation for light and the capability to see the beauty of the world around her.

How often we take our sight for granted. My mother's experience gave me an insight into what the loss of light truly means. Each and every day we are blessed to see God's light all around us. Even in darkness we can feel His light. Our mission as His disciples is to spread that light to all those we meet. And sometimes to spread it to those we may never meet.

- ★ Where do I see God's light in my life?
- ★ How do I spread God's light in my daily actions?
- ★ Do I remember to pray for the parishioners of our Sister Parish, St. Lucia?

Roger Wisialowski

*“But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord...” Zephaniah 3:12*

*“When John came preaching a way of holiness, you put no faith in him; but tax collectors and the prostitutes did believe in him. Yet even when you saw that, you did not repent and believe in him.” Matthew 21:32*

Today’s readings call me to be poor and open to God’s will. In the first reading, Zephaniah, expresses this call as being “humble and lowly” and “taking refuge in the name of the Lord.” In the Gospel passage, Jesus answers the Jewish chief priests and elders with the parable of the two sons: the one who seems rebellious, but eventually did as the father asked; and the one who seems to be obedient, but did not do his father’s bidding. So it is with us. Often the sinners – poor, humble and lowly – are open to God’s ways; whereas the self-righteous think they know what is best.

For one who likes to be in control and have things go my way, the readings are a challenge. Am I willing to let go of my plans, to change my priorities, to respond to what God sends my way each day? Am I so convinced that my way to be a good disciple is the only way, that I can’t hear or see other calls to discipleship?

I have two touchstones that I use at the end of a day: If what happens doesn’t make sense, it is probably from God; and I also remember the adage, Woman/Man proposes, God disposes. (The life of Jesus, our redeemer and savior, gives special credence to the first.) Relying on these touchstones tends to keep me on track to letting God be God in my life.

At the end of today review how you responded to God’s promptings as they came to you through family members, in your work situation, in nature, at prayer, through the media, or....

★ How can you be more attentive to God’s action in your life?

Mary Jacqueline Buckley, SSND

*“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?...” Luke 7: 20; 22*

*“I am the Lord, there is no other...” Isaiah 45: 6b*

Our house was for sale. But unlike what most people would do, we committed to making a move, and then put our house up for sale. This – in one of the worst housing markets ever.

As the days went on and the showings happened, we kept our fingers crossed – and we prayed. Alan had turned the situation over to St. Joseph, but chose not to bury his statue in the yard. We prayed and begged and prayed some more. The closing date on the new place approached, and we still had no offers. Suddenly, and finally – the miracle happened. An offer to purchase came through.

We accepted the offer, and on the date of the inspection we met our prospective buyer. His first words to us were, “I just love your house, and I will take good care of it.” At this, our mouths dropped. What a blessing were his words to us! (For Diane, who gets attached to just about everything she owns, it is always difficult to part with anything. Even getting a new car does not completely erase her sadness at having to trade in the old one.)

To continue, as if our prospective buyer’s initial words weren’t enough he went on, saying, “Yes, I love your house. It is a gift from God.” We couldn’t believe it! God and St. Joseph must have been working together, and certainly, Joseph had God’s ear. As we write this, we are still awaiting confirmation that the sale will take place. But we are hopeful, and trust that the transfer of our home to this potential new caretaker will be realized.

Luke tells about the disciples asking Jesus if he is the one who is to come, or should they look for another? Jesus responded by saying, “Go and tell what you have seen. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk.”

And now we have seen that our house is a gift from God!

In the words of Isaiah, “I am the Lord, there is no other.”

- ★ What are some of the significant challenges that cause me to pray?
- ★ How do I handle my uncertainties on trusting that my well being is God’s plan?

Alan & Diane O’Connor

*"...among those born of women, no one is greater than John; yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." Luke 7: 29*

Less than two weeks before Christmas. We lead busy, hectic lives, always so much to do and seemingly so little time to finish everything. However, as we count down the final days before Christmas, we should strive to remember Luke's words that Jesus is not impressed by those who live "sumptuously...in royal palaces" or by material wealth, expensive gifts showered on us or others. In this time of hyper consumerism and materialism, Jesus does not want us to be "a reed swayed by the wind," falling prey to the latest trend or fad, which is so easy to do when bombarded by constant advertising. Rather, Jesus reminds us to step back, to look to a person who lived simply in the wilderness rather than a palace, a person who did not bend regardless of the punishment or pressure he faced. Jesus wishes for us the same resolute spirit as possessed by John the Baptist, the one who is greater than all others "born of women."

Jesus goes on to proclaim that regardless of the heights John achieved, regardless of the esteem with which Jesus held him, all of us, the least in the Kingdom of God, are greater than John. We as Catholics and Christians could hope for no greater gift this Christmas than the gift of acceptance into the Kingdom of God! Because of God's goodness and love, we have achieved greater footing than John the Baptist himself.

As the final days before Christmas approach, let us appreciate and celebrate God's tremendous gift to us, our place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us show our gratitude by ensuring that others who may not otherwise have a joyous Christmas find reason to celebrate and discover the joy in Christmas, the wonderment of acceptance into the Kingdom of God. Let us acknowledge the righteousness of God through our actions.

- ★ Who is our John the Baptist that prepares the way for the Lord in us?
- ★ How do we or can we prepare the way for the Lord in others?
- ★ Do we on occasion take actions that reject the plan of God for ourselves?

Paul Hinkfuss

*“The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...” Matthew 1:1-17*

Lineage – descent – family histories...as we enter into the final days of waiting, we are presented with the remarkable account of Jesus’ earthly ancestry. We learn how God’s divine plan for His Son profoundly connects to 42 generations of lives! It reminds me that as a member of Jesus’ family, I belong to a lineage and family history that spans eternity.

As I reflected on this gospel, I began to see that there were multitudes of divine and human generations that have blest me and brought me “home” in my faith...the Divine Creator, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary, Joseph, Raphael the Archangel, my guardian angel, St. Anthony, St. Therese, St. Jude, an archbishop with homilies that called me to be more, priests who influenced my life at critical times, the wonderful sisters who taught and inspired me in high school, my parents and grandparents who brought love and faith to life, my sisters and their husbands who have welcomed me joyfully into their lives, my beautiful godchildren, nieces and nephews who challenge me to keep up with them, friends from high school and college who helped me to become authentically me, the leader of a teen-mass guitar group and her best friend who encouraged us to use our gifts, a colleague who took time to lift me up, a parishioner who always smiles when she sees me, the people I have served at a local meal program, friends with whom I pray the rosary, friends whom I’ve met recently who have offered new ways of looking at the world, a best friend who is always there for me, and a friend with whom I’ve lost touch but who is carried in my heart...through these divine and human connections, I have felt Christ’s warm welcome and embrace. I know who I am and to whom I belong!

- ★ How do you tell the story of your Christian ancestry?
- ★ Who are the divine and human generations that draw you into Jesus’ beloved family?

Mickey Wallis

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” Matthew 1:20*

Since my youth I have always been drawn to the human nature that is displayed within the Scriptures. There is something so powerful in seeing the human condition at its worst overcome negativity and instead embrace a challenge and grow from it. The Bible is filled with such examples. In this verse, human emotion is so evident in the manner in which Joseph responds to Mary’s condition. He is humble and honorable, but he is also dejected and pitiful as he looks at his choices. But through his own faith and relationship with God, his answers came to him in the version of a dream. In this dream an angel assured Joseph that his faith is strong, and his duty is stronger in the fulfillment of prophecy being presented at the moment. Joseph’s realization that his own “plans” in life are not necessarily “The Plan” meant for Joseph by Him, is a lesson we all struggle with daily. Joseph was able to overcome his own human ego to recognize his role in the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Only by strong faith and a commitment to live our lives for Him can we also make choices that may be painful, but are correct and rooted in faith and caring. Joseph was able to grow and recognize that he was strong enough to do as directed by Him through his dream. When the time came, the prophecy presented to him led his decisions going forward, regardless of the social implications this situation presented him. Faith, on that level, can lead us to overcome any situation presented to us, no matter how unsettling and uncomfortable it may be for us. Our emotional capacity does not trump the path God has set for us to follow. Joseph’s story can inspire us to overlook our own uncomfortable feelings to provide compassion and love even as we feel pain and disappointment in our own egos.

- ★ In what ways can this story of Joseph influence how you deal with disappointment in your own life?
- ★ How are you able to look beyond the emotion of a given moment and instead try to understand the purpose behind the moment?
- ★ In what way does prayer and reading Scripture help you determine the purpose behind your actions?

Trevin Larkin

*“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us)” Matthew 1:23*

Mary had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph. She was asked to assume a burden of tremendous responsibility. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was not tolerated in those days. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God’s promises.

Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish his espoused wife. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Like Mary, Joseph is a model of faith for us. He is a faithful witness and servant of God’s unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God has not left us alone, but has brought us his only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us celebrate Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, with joyful hearts and let us renew our faith and hope in God and in his redeeming work.

Lord Jesus, you came to save us from sin and the power of death. May we always rejoice in your salvation and trust in your plan for our lives. Let us ask Mary and Joseph to prepare us, so that the grace of God, which can accomplish anything, will be our strength today, tomorrow and always!

- ★ How strong is your faith?
- ★ When has your faith been tested?
- ★ How can you prepare yourself for those times of “testing”?

Schauneille R. Allen

*“For nothing is impossible with God.” Luke 1:37*

A story was told: “On the street I saw a small girl cold and shivering in a thin dress, with little hope of a decent meal. I became angry and said to God: ‘Why did you permit this? Why don’t you do something about it?’ For a while God said nothing. That night he replied, quite suddenly: ‘I certainly did something about it. I made you.’”

In today’s Gospel reading the birth of Jesus is foretold. A young girl is told that the Lord is with her; she has found favor with God and she will fulfill God’s promise of a Savior. Impossible? No, for God is with her and “nothing is impossible with God.” Both stories speak to me of God’s continued incarnation in our world.

About 10 years ago I had a young man come to me for spiritual direction. He was very despondent as he felt God had abandoned him, not answering his prayers. As he talked and shared his anger I was reminded about the above story. Often when I am anxious and fearful I ask God to take away these feelings and replace them with a calmness and a certainty of God’s presence. At those times I am expecting God to answer in a certain way. After the fact I realize that I have had tunnel vision in how I expect God to answer me, probably not unlike the Israelites of old. I am sure that they didn’t expect God to fulfill his promise of a Savior through the “yes” of a young unknown girl who was still a virgin. That was probably why so many people had difficulty believing and accepting that the Son of God was born to a virgin in a manger surrounded by animals and visited by earthly shepherds. However the shepherds got it, Mary got it, Joseph got it, Elizabeth got it and the Three Kings got it. Why? I’m thinking it’s because they believed that nothing is impossible with God. We just have to open the ears and eyes of our hearts to God’s incarnational answer to our daily prayers. Perhaps incarnation occurs in the smile of a coworker or the helping hand of a friend or family member. Perhaps it is an affirmation from an acquaintance.

The birth of Jesus did not mean the end of pain and suffering. It meant God created us to continue God’s mission to be incarnation to others and alleviate some of the suffering in the world.

- ★ When in your life, like Mary, has God said to you: “Do not be afraid for I have found favor with you?”
- ★ How is God asking you to “incarnate” God’s Son to others today?

Kate Sullivan

*“For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for you.” Luke 1:44*

I can still remember the unbelievable sight of my first grandchild when my son and daughter-in-law asked me to join them for the ultrasound at the hospital. Of course we didn't have such equipment when my children were born. Sitting there watching the screen, through my tears, I couldn't believe my eyes! My first grandchild in the womb! Incredible! A miracle! My heart burst! How could I possibly love this child anymore than at that moment? Hannah, I knew you before you were born. I loved you so before you were born. When I got to meet Hannah in person the sound of her greeting, her soft cry, once again made my heart leap for joy!

You have your children and you love them more than you ever thought possible. But then wait, you have grandchildren and you love them so much more that you ever thought possible! Where does all this love come from? Just when you thought you had loved as much and as all consuming as you thought humanly possible you come up with even more love to give! What do they say...the best way to get love is to give it away.

Our God loves us more than we can ever imagine. He loves us no matter what we do or say, or don't do or don't say. How can we not love others in turn? How can we not return love with love? How can we be his disciples and not be love to others.

- ★ Who do I need to love this Advent?
- ★ Who is love to me?
- ★ How can I help spread God's love to those most in need of it?

Pat Wisialowski

*“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior.” Luke 1:46 “Holy is His name, and His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.” Luke 1:49*

In a few days we will be celebrating Christmas – a celebration of the birth of our savior, Christ Jesus. Imagine having one’s birthday celebrated almost two thousand years past one’s lifetime.

Mary and Elizabeth were celebrating that long ago. It was about three months before John the Baptist would be born and perhaps Mary was only beginning to know the child growing within her. But they were happy and excited. Hopefully the feeling we should be having as we await the coming HOLYday.

Mary had learned of God’s plans for her and about her cousin Elizabeth, who after many barren years had conceived a son. She left to see Zechariah and Elizabeth in a small town in the hillside of Judah after that visit from the Angel Gabriel.

It was as they greeted each other upon Mary’s arrival at their home that Elizabeth asked “Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?” Mary answered with the words of Luke’s gospel, I: 46-56. It has become a prayer we know as the Magnificat. God affirms through Mary’s words His everlasting mercy to all mankind. His greatness and His mercy are with us.

From the very early moments of Gabriel’s announcement to Mary she accepted, believed and trusted in God. She went quickly to Elizabeth to support her and stayed with her until after John was born. God had given Mary strong signs that what she had been told and accepted were indeed happening: She herself knew she was with child, yet she had not known man; and, Elizabeth did indeed bear a son who was named John.

Even though she must have had fear and concern, Mary rejoiced and acknowledged the greatness of the Lord; she recognized GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – would be with her and with all mankind. She humbly understood she was His lowly handmaid.

Through the human birth of our Lord and His dying we have each been given strong signs of God’s mercy and love and an opportunity for everlasting life. Indeed, we are surrounded with many signs of God’s presence in our lives. What better time to thank God for these gifts than now as we prepare for this HOLY season.

- ★ As Mary did, have you accepted, do you believe and trust in God?
- ★ Can you recognize visible signs of God’s presence in your life?

Joan Braun

*“But who will endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?” Malachi 3: 2*

When I read those words assigned to me for the Advent reflections booklet, the first thing that came to mind was the musical verse from Handel’s great oratorio “Messiah.” As a musician, I have performed this work many times - often the words drift in and out, but the music “sticks.”

Today’s readings refer to the coming of the messenger: “Lo, I am sending my messenger...to prepare the way before me.”

“He (Zechariah) asked for a tablet, and wrote, ‘John is his name’,” and all were amazed - immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.”

Why do we need someone to “prepare” us for God? Why couldn’t Jesus have just appeared? Maybe we would have “missed” him somehow. What would have happened if Jesus were to be born today, in this time, in this country and culture? Would we have seen him? Would someone have prepared our way?

Zechariah removed his doubt when his mouth was opened and he could speak, praising God, after a long silence. Often I feel “silent” – unsure, unknowing...wondering if and when I will hear a message from God.

I think the messages are all around us, but that we are often unable to “tune in” to the right channel. We hear the message in different ways: for me it may be those riveting words from Messiah; for another, it might be something completely different.

I think we need to somehow “let go,” allowing space so that we can hear the word of God to prepare for the day of His coming.

- ★ How does God speak to you?
- ★ Where and when do you feel receptive to God?

Karen P. Smith

*“You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.”  
Luke 1:76*

Did you ever have it happen to you where you had the perfect Christmas present picked out for someone only to have that person inform you he or she did not want a present? How did you feel? Most likely hurt and disappointed. That’s how David must have felt when no sooner did he tell Nathan that he hoped to build a temple for God in the Holy City of Jerusalem when Nathan came back with the news that God did not want a temple to be built. (2 Samuel 7)

Why did God say that? There were several reasons. First, God was used to dwelling in a tent. He did so ever since His people left Egypt. It was probably embarrassing to David to have his God dwelling in a tent while pagan gods dwelt in temples. Secondly, God wanted the freedom to dwell anywhere and everywhere and not be confined to four walls no matter how beautiful they might be. Finally, God had an entirely different plan in mind. Not a building constructed by David but rather the dwelling would be David’s progeny - an offspring of David’s family. This is the dwelling God had in mind. Something that was way beyond what David could have imagined. From David’s family would come the Promised One. What a surprise! What a unique privilege!

In today’s Gospel reading from Luke we see the fulfillment of that promise in the prophetic words uttered by the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, “Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel because he has visited and ransomed his people. He has raised up a horn of saving strength for us in the HOUSE of David his servant as he promised through the mouths of his holy ones, the prophets of ancient times...”

There is an important lesson to be learned here for all of us. We must be ready for the surprises that God sends our way and not be disappointed because things do not always turn out the way we hoped or expected. We should have learned early on that God’s ways are not our ways. Maybe this had happened to you this Advent. You are not alone. It happened to David, to Zechariah and to Mary who was not planning on becoming a mother.

- ★ What surprises has God placed in front of me as I follow him in discipleship?

Mary Foti

There are three sets of readings assigned for the magnificent feast of Christmas, the scriptural texts for Mass at Midnight, Mass at Dawn, and Mass during the Day. The gospel for Midnight and Dawn come from St. Luke and detail the birth of Christ and the story of the shepherds. The gospel for Mass during the Day comes from the prologue of St. John's gospel. Since I never get the chance to preach on the prolog of John's gospel, I'd like to reflect on that gospel (Jn 1:1-18) now.

The magnificent crucifix that hangs above the altar in the Cathedral by sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro depicts two central doctrines about Christ – his incarnation (symbolized by the diagonal shaft representing God's compassionate Love piercing through into human existence with the birth of Christ) and the redemption (symbolized by making that shaft a part of the cross of the suffering Christ). Both focuses – incarnation and redemption – are beautifully and poetically expressed in John's prologue. Both are a part of the Christmas mystery.

We celebrate today that from the beginning, even before time itself, the Word was with God and the Word was God. Through the Word of God all creation came into existence. I marvel that this Eternal Word, this totally Other One took on human flesh and became one of us. He freely chose to do this solely to redeem us. Because of his faithful love for us, he came as God's ultimate gift of self sacrificing love to us. Today, the eternal God was born in time in order to give us a share of divinity. He who created life now shares that life with us and promises eternal life.

St. John reminds us that our part in this Christmas scenario is simply to accept him. "To all who accept him, he gave the power to become children of God." Think of it, in accepting Christ, the Son of God, in accepting his birth in time, in accepting his redeeming love, we are reborn as children of God. This re-birth as children of God occurs whenever we accept Christ into our hearts or renew that acceptance. Christ came to earth as God's priceless gift to us; he remains God's priceless gift to us in our renewed acceptance of him and his way of life! In him we have a glimpse of what our life to come will be!

The purpose of gift-giving at Christmas is to imitate the generous love of God for us in gifting us with his Son.

- ★ Will my gift giving today reflect that reality?
- ★ If not, what can I do about it?

Fr. Carl Last

*“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:17*

Today’s scripture reading reminds us that God has a plan for each of us. He has given each of us a set of tools and circumstances, along with free will to make choices.

This summer, my husband and I finally made the decision to buy a larger home, in a very difficult housing market. Amidst the daily stresses associated with trying to buy and sell a house while raising a young family, I cope by taking firm control of any and all decisions that come my way and “plow forward” to get through the day with the least amount of complications. This allows time to fly by, making me feel as though I am missing out on the treasures of life and wondering if the daily cycle will ever cease.

Most of us take for granted the fact that God allows us to make our own decisions. How many of those decisions are made in the name of Christ? It is easy to get caught up in the details of our busy lives, forgetting that God is here with us, guiding, watching, facilitating. It doesn’t take any added time or effort to remember Christ in our efforts, our decisions, our words and deeds. It may, in fact, add precious minutes to the day and restore the treasure of life.

- ★ How would your daily choices change if you did ‘everything in the name of the Lord Jesus’?
- ★ What tools has God given you to do his good work?

Chrissy Sena

*"...what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life..." 1 John 1:3*

I've often wondered how one's outlook on life changes if, for whatever reason, any of the five senses are lost. Does this loss liberate or limit a person? Would cooking be as enjoyable if flavors could not be detected? If music became only a series of vibrations rather than a melody, would CDs become dusty from lack of use? Would a love of reading still exist if, instead of seeing typeface in a novel, Braille letters were felt with the fingers?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "sense" as: a meaning conveyed or intended, or a definite but often vague awareness or impression. Senses are a shared experience as much as a personal one. We are seeing, hearing, and touching right alongside others. While interacting with others and with our environment, lives are enriched through every sensory encounter. We may not recognize the significance at the time, but our lives are impacted just the same. Sometimes God is hard to find in these everyday exchanges. Being unable to experience God is being unable to sense Him in daily life. We cannot sense Him in others or in ourselves and that makes all the difference.

As we go about our lives, of course the decorations are beautiful, the scent of baking cookies is appetizing, and the carols are lovely. During these weeks, we experience sensory overload at times. Let's challenge ourselves to search for the less obvious but more meaningful signs of the season. Becoming aware of and impressed by the example of Jesus and the message of His Word is difficult. But there is no better time of year to let that Word take root and shape our lives.

- ★ How do I sense God in my daily life?
- ★ What have I heard and seen lately about the Word of life?
- ★ Can others become more aware of the Lord through me?

Tina Merwin

*“Here, then, is the message we heard from him and announce to you: that God is light; in him there is no darkness”. If we say “We have fellowship with him, while continuing to walk in darkness, we are liars and do not act in truth.” 1 John 1:5-6*

I recently did some babysitting for my 12-month old twin grandkids. They have both just started walking and it was so cute to see them occupied with their toys and with each other. As one would walk across the room, they would stumble and knock the other one down. Or they would drop their own toy to take one away from their sibling. But they are so cute and you just want to hug them over and over.

The same is true with God. Even though we often stumble in our daily lives, God is ready to pick us up and hug us once again. John tells us in this passage that God is the light, which represents truth and goodness. As much as we would like to emulate these values, our best intentions are sometimes thwarted by temptations or laziness or just self-righteousness. We allow the world around us to have a darkening affect on our behaviors. Our values are constantly challenged. We might not always make decisions that keep us on the path with God.

But the most important thing is for us to be humble and honest with ourselves. We may fall into darkness once in awhile. And we will be ashamed. But we must not feel defeated and hopeless and wander off the path of God even further. We are told by John that “if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong.” God will forgive us and be the light that allows us to find our way back to his path.

Human beings are drawn to lights. Even non-gamblers love to go to Vegas. Hopefully we continue to be drawn to God’s light. Advent is a season of hope. A new calendar year is about to start. We usually start a new year with resolutions to do our personal best. But it is important to know that if we stumble, God is willing to pick us up and give us a big hug. He wants only the best for us. He loves us that much.

- ★ How do we react when we stumble on the path of God?
- ★ Do we realize that as God watches over us, he is smiling and ready to forgive us?

Al Ogorzalek

*“The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments.” 1 John 2: 3*

During Advent, we are called to reflect on how we live out God’s word in our daily life. Through John, God calls on us to live out his commandments and walk with him. God calls us to a life long commitment to discipleship. It is not enough to call ourselves Catholics and attend Sunday services. We must continue on a lifelong journey to follow the ways of Jesus here on earth. God calls on us to demonstrate love through grace, compassion, and empathy to those around us in our everyday life. When our actions reflect love for our brother, we will live in the light of Jesus.

As we journey through this advent season, ask yourself how you can come to know God more fully by loving your neighbor. Following Christ is not always easy. Have you ever been blinded by hatred and found yourself stumbling with your faith? When have you felt most loved by God? Our love for God must be connected to the real world. Walk with Jesus during this advent season by showing your love to those around us. Do a “random act of kindness” and feel the light of Christ. You can find internal joy by carrying out God’s commandments in our daily interactions with others. Encourage your family and friends to do the same. God calls us to action as many people in our world struggle during this advent season and beyond. Allow Jesus to be your guide, open your hearts to his love and help, and do not be blinded by sin. In doing this, He will lead us to our final destination.

- ★ When has hatred and hypocrisy made you stumble in your journey with Christ and what can you do to amend this?
- ★ How have you lived out your faith through interaction with those in need during this advent season?

Therese Pogorelc

*“Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.” 1 John 2:17*

In today’s first reading, John writes to several groups of the Christian community. He writes to the children, the fathers, and the young men. After reading the passage many times, I think John is talking to people at different stages of faith. The children would be the new Christians. Through their belief, their sins have been forgiven. The “fathers” would be the mature Christians. They “know” the Father. They are more certain of their faith. And the “young men” would be people who are not new Christians but may be still developing their faith. John says they have conquered the evil one. Maybe this means that through knowing God and through the grace of God they are armed against sin. But they must avoid the enticements of the world. For the world and its enticements “are passing away” but those who do the will of God “remain forever.”

In today’s Gospel, the prophetess, Anna, was elderly. I think she would be in the “father” category from John’s letter. She had devoted her life to prayer, “never leaving the temple.” When she saw the infant Jesus she was able to recognize Him. Verse 39 says she thanked God and spoke about the child to “all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.” Due to her persistent fasting, prayer, and devotion to God she was able to recognize the Lord when she saw Him.

These readings help me realize that I still have work to do in my own faith development. I’m not in the “child” stage like I was 12 years ago when I first started coming to church again. But I am not at the stage of Anna either.

★ Where are you in your faith development?

Zoe Shreffler

*“The true light which enlightens everyone” John 1: 9-14*

Today on this last day of 2010, we read and hear the same gospel message that we heard only a few days ago on Christmas Day. Is it by chance that the church chooses to use this same gospel on the last day of the year? I think it was done on purpose, by the church, for us to hear this message again. I believe it relates a brilliant, shining example of God’s love for us. God chose to reveal to us, in the form of our own likeness, a baby. A baby that what would one day grow to adulthood and become a luminous example of God revealing his own plan for each one of us. He did this to bring us out of darkness so that we might be a shining light to those around us, assisting God in bringing about, “the true light which enlightens everyone.”

If we reread and sit with this gospel message, we might feel somewhat perplexed, uncomfortable and maybe even awed at what God is urging us to accomplish in our lifetime. We may feel, as I do at times, a little inadequate and maybe even insufficient at times. We may feel that there is someone more accomplished, with much more wisdom or more knowledge that can help someone understand God’s love for us. But that is not the case in God’s eyes. God gave us this shining light, Jesus, to make sure that we, meaning all of us, can handle anything that might cross our path if we are open and willing to accept the challenge to make God more present in our lives and the lives of those we touch.

I ran across a very short story that might help us illustrate this a little bit better. There once was a warrior who was coming down a road on a mighty mount. Everyone got out of his way. He came upon a sparrow lying on his back with his feet up in the air. Demanded the warrior, “What are you doing, you silly twit?” The sparrow replied, “I was told the sky was going to fall down and I am attempting to hold it up.” The warrior laughed and laughed till the tears ran down his scarred face. He shouted, “Even if the sky were to fall down, what help would you be with those thin little legs?” The sparrow, completely nonplussed, said softly, “You do what you can.”

I leave you with this as I struggle and adhere to this myself. “I know that I cannot do it all, but God will guide me and I will try.”

Peace and have a blessed and glorious New Year. Stay safe and enjoy bringing in the New Year.

Deacon Tom Hunt

# Advent Calendar 2010

*NOVEMBER 28 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Advent Vespers**

*NOVEMBER 30 - 6:00 P.M. (ATRIUM)*

**Advent Soup & Substance with Fr. Andy Nelson**

*DECEMBER 5 - 9:00 A.M. (ATRIUM)*

**What Is Your Christmas Made Of?**

*DECEMBER 5 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Advent Vespers**

*DECEMBER 7 - 6:00 P.M. (ATRIUM)*

**Advent Soup & Substance with Fr. Andy Nelson**

*DECEMBER 8 - 12:15 P.M. & 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Immaculate Conception Mass**

*DECEMBER 11 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Communal Anointing of the Sick**

*DECEMBER 11 - 6:15 P.M. (ATRIUM)*

**An Evening in Advent with Fr. Mike Hammer**

*DECEMBER 12 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL & ATRIUM)*

**Advent Lessons & Carols**

*DECEMBER 18 - 7:30 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra**

*DECEMBER 19 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL)*

**Advent Vespers**

*DECEMBER 24 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL) &*

*DECEMBER 25 - MIDNIGHT (11:30 P.M. PRELUDE) & 10:00 A.M.*

**The Nativity of the Lord - Christmas Mass**

*DECEMBER 31 - 5:15 P.M. (CATHEDRAL) &*

*JANUARY 1, 2011 - 9:00 A.M.*

**Mary, Mother of God - New Year's Mass**

*For more information, please see the  
Sunday bulletins or [www.stjohncathedral.org](http://www.stjohncathedral.org).*

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