

St John's Kirkland Episcopal Church

WELCOME TO ADVENT

In order to prepare our hearts and minds for Jesus' birth, 27 men and women from the parish have read and reflected on the Scriptures from the Daily Office (Year Two) and Sunday lectionary readings (Year C) designated for Advent. We now want to share our meditations with you. May they be as much of a blessing for those of you who read them as they were for those who wrote them.

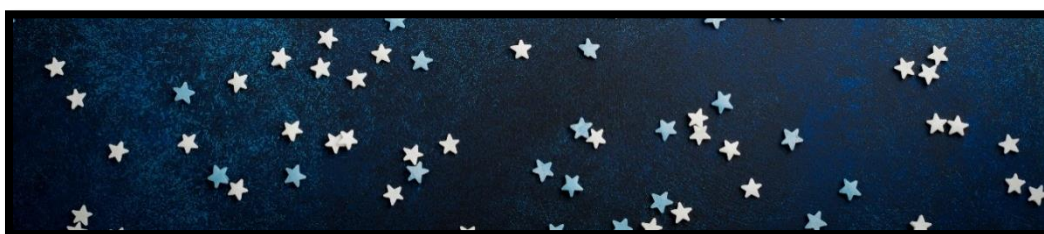
The Rev. Jane C. Rohrer, Editor



Now, picture yourself on the road to Emmaus

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Luke 24:32 “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”



This reading from Luke, a portion of The Walk to Emmaus, is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It is also a great introduction to this first day of Advent and the beginning of this year’s journey through the St. John’s Advent meditation guide. And while we will be preparing once more for Jesus’ birth in a manger in Bethlehem on Christmas day, we will be reading about Christ’s life, his teachings, his death and resurrection and his anticipated return. We will be studying God’s Word and, through that study, will draw closer to God in new and special ways. And that is what this passage from Luke is all about!

The same day that the women found the tomb empty because Jesus had risen from the dead, Cleopas and a friend were walking to the village of Emmaus (near Jerusalem). They were talking about all the things that had happened the past three days. While walking and discussing, Jesus came near and walked with them, but they did not recognize him. Jesus asked them, “What are you discussing?” Cleopas sadly responded, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” When Jesus asked, “What things?” They described Jesus’ life, his death on the cross and the women’s experience at the tomb that morning. Jesus, then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they neared Emmaus, Jesus walked ahead as if he were going on. But Cleopas and his friend urged him to stay with them, since it was almost evening. Jesus, their guest, did and when he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. Immediately, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. He vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?”

Even though Cleopas and his friend lived while Jesus was alive, heard him speak and saw his miracles, and knew of his death and the empty tomb, they still did not recognize him. They heard Jesus personally interpret the scriptures about himself and sat with Jesus as he broke bread and shared it with them. It was only then that their eyes opened, and they saw Jesus. It was only then that they realized their hearts had been burning while Jesus was opening the scriptures to them. As we begin this Advent journey together, we will be studying God’s Word through Bible readings and meditations. May we open our eyes and our ears so that we, too, can see and hear Jesus—so that we, too, can have hearts that burn within us.

Ted Ederer

Psalm 25:1-10

Jer. 33: 14-16

1 Thes. 3:9-13

Luke 22: 25-36

Monday, November 29

Matthew 21:14–15 “The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they were indignant.”

Jealousy, greed, indignation, hatred—these are not things we usually think of in the season of Advent; and yet, these emotions do exist, have always existed and will continue to exist throughout the years. Jesus came to do wonderful things: bring hope, forgiveness, healing of body and soul, and most of all, love, and yet he was condemned as a blasphemer and a criminal because the religious leaders and teachers of the law were jealous of him. How very sad it is when doing good is twisted and maligned. Even sadder is that we still haven’t learned this lesson over 2,000 years later.

It’s been a very long and difficult time the past 2 years, and each day we look forward to when things will get back to “normal”. But when we look back to the time of Jesus in the temple and what he did there and during his ministry, we need to acknowledge that “normal” is really just another word for constant change. “Normal” is what happens every day and each day is a new beginning—a chance to do things differently, to be better, to be more of who and what Jesus meant for us to be and what we are called to be in our Baptismal Covenant. Each day is a gift that we can share with others and treasure in our hearts. We can shout for joy, cry in despair, listen to the laughter of children and so much more. We can also take a good hard look inside and see if we are harboring feelings of jealousy, greed, or hatred against others. Are we too much like those religious leaders who thought they were better than others, who were in a position to help others but too greedy to do it? COVID has changed our world but it has also given us an opportunity to be better than we were before it happened, to take “normal” to a new level, where hope, healing and love flourish and the negative is put aside.

Jesus is all about healing, forgiveness, hope and love. Advent is a time of preparation. Now is the time for us to prepare to bring healing, forgiveness, love and hope to each other and make these our new “normal,” leaving the rest behind. And let the children shout in the Temple Courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” for we are all the children of God!



Marti Riley

Ps. 1, 2, 3

Amos 2:6-16

2 Pet. 1:1-11

Mt. 21:1-11

Tuesday, November 30

Psalms 6:5 “For in death there is no remembrance of Thee, in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?”

In the Old Testament, the teachings about life after death are confusing. In this passage, we are told that we won't remember God after we die. In Ecclesiastes we are told that “the dead know not anything” and “it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion.” And yet in Job we learn that “after my body is destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” The vision of eternal life, as taught in the Old Testament, is cloudy.

Yet the New Testament is full of hope about the afterlife. In 2 Timothy 1:10 we are told that Jesus has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light”. With this light we are able to see that death is not something to be feared. Jesus told the dying thief on the cross, “Today, you shall be with me in paradise.” Paul told his listeners in Philippians 1:21, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain....I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” He taught the Corinthian church, “Knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord....we are willing to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:6,8). And in Hebrews 12:1 we learn that “we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses”—those who have been mentioned as dying in the previous chapter.

As I get older and so many of my family (and a few friends) have passed on to eternal life, it is so comforting to know that the verse in Psalms telling me that we won't be remembered or know anything after death is superseded by the promises we learn in verses such as

1 Corinthians 2:9, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” For the believer, death is not something to be feared. Christ has won the victory over death.

Diane Perman

Psalms 5,6

Amos 3:1-11

2 Pet. 1:12-21

Mt. 21: 12-22



Wednesday, December 1

Psalm 119:1, 5 “Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.... “oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!”

These verses by the Psalmist introduce us to the longest Psalm and one that is set up in the structure of an acrostic based on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Both of these features suggest there is something here worth noting, perhaps even something that might have been designed to prompt easy memorization. Verse 1 seems to boldly offer an open door to a life of joy; but by verse 5 there is already a tone of regret, anxiety and longing with the realization that the gap might be wide between desiring and doing, and the writer makes a plea for help in trying to go through this door.

Would we really be attracted to keeping God's laws? A first reaction to this might be concern that we will be adhering to a legalistic, harsh, judgmental, punitive way of living--something we might more realistically be yearning to escape. And therein is the need for the prayer, "O that my ways may be steadfast..." as our ways come in conflict with God's ways.

Are God's laws and statutes restrictive? When we follow the rules of the road there is an absence of chaos, a form of relaxation and ability to enjoy the drive, a sense of safety and promotion of the common good. So, what we thought might be subjugation actually becomes freedom and the blessing of obedience.

And what is at the heart of God's law, but the call to love?

Personally, my ways are most often and too easily individualistic, self-centered and self-serving, all of which blind me with pride and deafness to God's ways, let alone steadfastness in them. To abandon my ways requires diligent pleas to God to keep me mindful of God's law; assistance in bridging the gap between good desires and actual ability for loving action; grace in my great insufficiency; and opening my eyes to actively reflect on all the seemingly small decisions I make related to putting God's law into practice.



I don't think the Psalmist was able to pen these scriptures at the outset of the journey, but only after having been humbled with the struggle. May we keep at that struggle, too—steadfast.

Sharon Grabner

Psalm 119:1-24

Amos 3:12-4:5

2 Pet. 3:1-10

Mt. 21:23-32

Psalm 18:6 “In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.”



This verse from the Psalmist is a song shared to God when he was delivered from his enemies and the hands of Saul. It is a recounting of the distress he felt when there was no way out except through a power greater than himself, from One who would move heaven and earth to help when asked. After this plea, the Psalmist continues to reveal just how powerfully God came to his aid, as “the Lord thundered in the heavens,” keeping his promise, rewarding the psalmist’s righteous behavior.

Driving I-5 on dark, rainy mornings with traffic so fast I am unsure of when I can safely merge, there is comfort in knowing God’s spirit is with me as I ask for calmness and awareness of my surroundings to get to my destination safely. While the cars on the road are not the enemy, there is an impersonal nature to this venture and individual agendas that make me feel like I need to look out for myself and drive defensively, as one wrong move could have horrible consequences. Though normally driving is not this extreme, sometimes unintended things happen in our lives, no matter how conscientious we are. We get cancer after a lifetime of healthy food and exercise; we lose our jobs due to downsizing or automation; we don’t have enough money to buy the things we need, much less what we want; the people we love do not return our affections; we think we do all the right things and should get something different than we do, but we don’t—through no fault of our own or through doing everything wrong. God is present in all that we can’t figure out, although we continue to try.

What is something in your life that is causing you distress? While God may not be able to smite all our personal and societal enemies, God is there for us to call on, providing a space for us to cry at what is wrong, what is making us afraid, what we want to change, allowing us a space to acknowledge these feelings and ask for help and comfort. Take the opportunity to try this today. Labeling our emotions and sharing them can go a long way to opening a space for us to see who we are and what we can do. While we can’t always control the outcome, sharing our distress with God, knowing from this passage we are heard and not alone, perhaps can offer us some peace.

Paula Eisenrich

Psalm 18:1-20

Amos 4:6-13

2Pet. 3: 11-18

Mt. 21:33-46

Friday, December 3

Jude 1:3 “Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

The Epistle of Jude is the penultimate book of the New Testament, the last Epistle. Jude is believed to be the brother of James the Just, therefore a brother of Jesus, although he does not claim that relationship. He views himself as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and His teachings. He begins his letter by saying that, while he had hoped to celebrate the gift of mankind’s salvation, he instead needs to warn this congregation about dangers lurking within their midst. Instead of adhering to the authority and the teachings of Jesus, a group of “infiltrators” are encouraging a worldly, indulgent, “comfortable” lifestyle. Jude exhorts them to get rid of these unfaithful people and to “defend the faith” that Jesus Christ revealed to his followers. Vigilance against corruption of Christ’s teachings is required of all faithful followers.

Jude’s warning echoed as a clarion call to me. Having just attended the Diocesan Convention where we dwelt on the role of the Church in striving for justice and peace, I started to wonder, where had we been all this time? Had we not been striving for justice and peace? In this holy season of Advent, I wanted to celebrate how we had been the hands and feet of Christ to our neighbors, how we had brought the good news of salvation to unbelievers. Instead, I began looking at church history. In the evolution of the Church, we had moved from being a church that brings comfort to being a comfortable church. Jesus didn’t seem too concerned with being comfortable. He gave comfort to those who had need and sorrow and concentrated on making the “comfortable” very uncomfortable. In my experience, the Church has been a staunch defender of the *status quo*, changing only as societal pressure has made the Church’s positions uncomfortable. I think of the tacit, if not spoken, support of discriminatory laws. I think of leadership roles for women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community long denied, still denied in some denominations. I think of side-long glances at strangers, particularly those not as smartly dressed.

The good news is that the Church, especially in the past decade or two, has begun to see that defending the faith means stepping away from being comfortable. In our parish we have moved from collecting food for the food bank to opening our church home to our neighbors to come and dine. We have gone from decrying racial injustice from the pulpit to wearing our hearts on our sleeves, or at least our fence. Now more than ever, we need to look at the vipers of self-comfort and self-content. We must embrace the discomfort of truly knowing the other.

Karen Sjöström

Psalms 16,17

Amos 5:1-17

Jude 1-16

Mt. 22:1-14

Saturday, December 4

Amos 5:24 “Let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Amos was a prophet in the 8th century BCE. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was experiencing a time of peace and prosperity. But, with great wealth had come neglect and exploitation of the poor and vulnerable. People were sold into slavery for debt and were refused legal representation. Amos held the people accountable for their mistreatment of others. He said God did not like their hollow rituals and celebrations because they did not lead to justice and righteousness.

Justice and righteousness are core concepts in the Bible. These words describe the heart of God and tell us who we need to be to be in right relationship with God. The Hebrew meaning of “justice” is fairness and equity, especially for the widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. “Righteousness” means living in right relationship by treating everyone with fairness, generosity and equity.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted Amos 4:25 in his “I Have a Dream” speech delivered on Aug. 28, 1963:

“We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality... When we cannot gain lodging or meals in motels or hotels of our cities... When our mobility is from a small ghetto to a larger one.

We are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until Justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Dr. King was waiting for the waters of Justice to wash away the oppression and suffering of Black Americans. He dreamed of a future of generosity and equality for all people, no matter the color of their skin. He dreamed of a land where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, fairness, and mercy.

What waters of justice am I waiting for this Advent? I could easily be overwhelmed by the suffering and oppression of the poor and vulnerable. I could ignore my part in colluding with unjust systems. But I can also let the waters of justice roll over me, letting God work through me in word and deed to create a world of justice and righteousness.

Where do we see injustice, oppression and neglect of the poor and suffering? Like Amos and Dr. King, how can we use our words and actions to create a world of dignity, respect, and equity for all? “Let Justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like ever-flowing streams!”

Jeanne Ederer

Psalms 21:1-14

Amos 5:18-27

Jude 17-25

Mt. 22:15-22

Sunday, December 5

Luke 3:3-4 “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD, make straight paths for him. '”

These two verses are filled with historic fact and theological constructs. Let's first look at who 'he' is in verse three. From the context, we can see it is none other than John the Baptist. We know that John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, an older childless couple. But the angel Gabriel told them otherwise, and soon John was born about the same time as Jesus. John spent his time in the wilderness, and preached about baptism for repentance and forgiveness of sins. He wore a shirt made of camel hair and ate grasshoppers with honey. He refused to be identified as any kind of savior. When he baptized Jesus, he let the people know that he had merely prepared the way for Jesus who is the true savior.

As a young child, I thought John was a pretty cool dude. He lived in the wilds and relied on the land to feed and clothe him. I wanted to be like John. We didn't have camel hair, but Mom said wearing a wool coat over bare skin would feel similar, and grasshoppers were readily available in Oregon where I grew up. I learned that wool on bare skin is uncomfortable and that grasshoppers are better fried than raw. I admit there was not a lot of theology involved, but I did learn that Jesus would accept me however I came to him. In the time of Jesus and John, many Jews were desperate for a savior to help save them from the tyranny of Rome. Jews were familiar with immersion rituals, but John took baptism in a different direction. He preached that *all* people required baptism for the forgiveness of sin and to become members of God's kingdom. This was quite radical at the time. And, the fact the Jesus himself would be baptized by John – who lived in the wilderness, wore a camel hair shirt and ate locusts – was shocking to most. But to those who were baptized, it was a new beginning, with the hope of forgiveness and salvation. And the way was prepared by a wild-looking man with an unusual diet who would baptize anyone. You better believe it!

May we all be open to those who may be preparing the way for us, be they homeless, impoverished, immigrant or stranger. God comes to us in many ways, and we need to be ready to repent and be forgiven.



Ted Hunter

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1: 68-79

Phil. 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

Monday, December 6

Matthew 22:23, 28, 30 “The Sadducees came to Jesus, saying there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question.... Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ”

At this point in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is continuing to interact with religious leaders as he is getting nearer and nearer to the end of his time on the earth. Jesus meets a lot of opposition; this interrogation is by the Sadducees. They were mostly in the Jewish wealthy upper class and saw themselves as guardians of the pure Jewish faith (They only held to the teachings of the first five books of the Bible.). They also did *not* believe in resurrection or in angels! That is why they were *sad you see!* (Old Sunday School joke) Also, the Sadducees were envious of Jesus because He had a large following, and they were seeing their own followers follow Jesus.

Approaching Jesus, they courteously addressed him as "Teacher" and then tried to trip him up, asking Him “What will happen to a woman who was married to several husbands and who will be resurrected, together with all those former husbands? Would God consider her married to any or all of those former husbands?” They are trying to paint a funny and awkward scene: that when they all rise again, she will stand before her seven ex-husbands in heaven, and wonder who she is going to be with. Jesus simply replied 'You are wrong because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection, people will not marry; they will live and love on a new level that exceeds that of marriages here on earth. They will be like the angels in heaven. Jesus concluded that our Lord "... is God not of the dead, but of the living. “

Jesus did not mince words in telling the Sadducees that they were just, plain *wrong*. Perhaps this is what we are called to do when someone questions our beliefs or faith. We should not sit back and say nothing, but let them know our beliefs. As Christians, we believe we will be like angels. How cool is that? We will not see death. We will be beautiful. We will be glorious, we will be eternal. And there will be no need for any special marital relationships in heaven.

This passage gives us great hope for life after death, something to look forward to, and not to fear.

Paula Miller

Psalms 25

Amos 7:1-9

Rev. 1:1-8

Mt. 22:23-33



Tuesday, December 7

Amos 7:14-15 “Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'”

Way back in my college days, the leader of my church youth group wanted to make a point that *all* the Bible is important. So, he taught a six-week class on the book of Amos. We don't usually spend much time with Amos. I suppose he must come around in the lectionary every three years, but since that class long ago, I've never heard a sermon preached on his book.

Amos was a Judean average guy. He had a perfectly respectable and ordinary job in his home town, taking care of the sheep and keeping the orchard in good order. Now he has left his sheep, his orchard and his home town, he has traveled across the border, and he is saying things that people don't want to hear. Like many of the prophets, Amos is getting into trouble. Amaziah, who is cozy with the king, decides to put Amos in his place and basically tells him to shut up and go back to Judah where he belongs. I don't know exactly what Amos was feeling at the beginning of this encounter, but he almost sounds like he's agreeing with Amaziah. He didn't go to seminary. He doesn't have a distinguished family. He takes care of animals, and he has an orchard. He's a perfect example of an unexceptional Judean nobody.

Except - God sees it differently. And all of a sudden, the temporary fog clears out of Amos's brain. He may be just a shepherd and a farmer, but he knows that he is exactly where God wants him to be. I can almost see him pulling himself up tall and getting right into Amaziah's face. We never hear from Amaziah again. Amos and his book are still with us, showing us what the most ordinary of people can do if they listen for, and follow, God's call.

We'll hear about other shepherds this season. Let's remember Amos the shepherd and farmer, and honor his willingness to go where God leads.

Laura Neff

Psalms 26, 28

Amos 7:10-17

Rev. 1:9-16

Mt. 22: 34-46

Wednesday, December 8

Matthew 23:11-12 “The more lowly your service to others, the greater you are. To be the greatest, be a servant and those who humble themselves shall be exalted.”

When the Virus hit, our lives changed! For those who lived alone, the isolation was very hard to deal with! One day, I heard God telling me that I could go down to Juanita Beach and walk around, serving two needs—for myself and for others who also lived alone—smiling and giving them the feeling that people still cared about them! At first, a lot of people were clearly concerned about being near other people; then as I began to smile and say, “Hello,” particularly to seniors walking by themselves, I realized that I was getting an important message from our Lord! Even with the mask, we could still smile at one another and get the message of joy! Smile, Adeline, and say, “Hello, how are you doing?” The smiles I received in response were amazing and encouraging!

Some days I'm called to listen more than talk. For instance, on the day George Floyd was killed, I stopped in front of an African American gentleman sitting on the wall at the beach. He looked very sad. After I spoke to him, he started sharing his feelings of shock and loss and horror with me. I listened, seeing what a relief it was for him to talk about it. We parted as friends, not strangers.

On another day walking at the beach, I came across three young men sitting on a bench, each with a 6-inch submarine sandwich wrapped in paper on their laps. I stopped in front of them, and with a very serious face, looked at each of them and said: “Now you young gentlemen, do know that two days ago, the city of Kirkland Parks Department passed a new rule. If you bring your dinner down to the Beach and you are going to eat it there, you have to be willing to share it with someone who's hungry—and with a very straight face, I pulled my mask down and said, “Guys, I'm hungry!!!” They stared at me, obviously considering what I had just said. Then the young one on the end of the bench started to smile as he unwrapped his sandwich! I put my mask back on and said with a big grin on my face: “Guys, I'm playing a joke on you” and doubled over with laughter!” It was lovely! We all laughed”

After each walk on the beach, on my way home, I say a prayer of thanks to God for giving me a way to share God's gift of love at a very difficult time. Each of us has our own special way of sharing God's love with others: “The more lowly your service to others, the greater you are!”

What is your way of sharing God's love with other people?

Adeline Crinks

Psalms 38

Amos 8:1-14

Rev.1:17-2:7

Mt. 23: 1-12

Thursday, December 9

Psalm 37:3 “Trust in the Lord and do good.”

I love reading the Psalms. They speak to me and I identify with their authors' myriad of emotions in facing real life challenges. Yet, they also offer practical solutions to coping and walking through them, as this verse states. Whatever I'm facing, "Trust in the Lord and do good". Simple, easy. Well, not for me.

Trust is a huge issue in life. Trust in self, others, systems, whatever; yet we do it dozens of times in a day. Driving the interstate, turning on a light switch, using my bank's system to make payments, getting a Covid injection or buying on Amazon—we trust that all of these will deliver what we expect. Trust God? Well, easy words to say and they sound so spiritual. Yet, I, anyway, have to work through the mental and emotional stuff first, then turn whatever I'm coping with over to God. An act of surrender is usually involved. Often this isn't passive, like sitting and waiting, doing nothing. Perhaps the Spirit guides me to do something: take some steps of action as I perceive I'm nudged to do. That's my responsibility. The results, I leave in God's hands. This goes on day by day and situation by situation, as needed. I keep needing to learn and practice this principle.

What about you this Advent Season? Are you being called to trust God with a certain situation, person, desire, etc.? What is your response? Yet, in the midst of that, we must also remember to keep doing good.

Blessed Advent, I pray we all walk this season in Trust in God to the best of our ability.

Donna Rae Cotton

Psalm 37:1-18

Amos 9:1-10

Rev. 2:8-17

Mt. 23: 13-26



Friday, December 10

Psalm 31:3 “Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold; for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.”

The Psalmist is calling on God not only to protect him from his enemies and the non-believers, but also to thank God for protecting him and delivering him to safety. He is also asking to be shielded from his own erroneous thinking and wrongdoing. He is appealing for guidance from the Lord in his beliefs and for protection from the snares of the enemy.

We are in a time of many false beliefs and lies that are being pushed upon our country. Many in the world around us seem to accept these untruths as fact and do not question their source. Also, we are unwilling to look at ourselves and our past and see the errors and wrongdoings that we or our ancestors have committed. We are unwilling to see that we continue to commit these errors and that we need to change. This verse is asking God to lead us. What can I do to overcome racism, fear of immigrants, hate for or fear of those who are different than I am, the privilege with which I was born by color and economic status? “...Lead me and guide me.”



At St. John's and in the Diocese of Olympia we are offered many opportunities to learn and to act upon what we have learned with God's guidance. We have been presented with multiple opportunities to learn about racism that continue to this day, including the white privilege that many of us have from birth and do not even realize that we have. Within our community of St. John's, the city of Kirkland, and the greater Seattle area there are numerous opportunities to show our support with God's leadership: "Black Lives Matter" demonstrations, the Gay Pride parades, and educational opportunities such as the "Me and White Supremacy" classes at St. John's or other formation opportunities at the Diocese. What is God calling you to do? How is God leading us and guiding us into awareness and action in making this a better community and a better world?

Connie Lightbody

Psalm 31

Haggai 1:1-15

Rev. 2:18-29

Mt. 23:27-39

Saturday, December 11

Psalm 32: 1 "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

Ever since I was a little girl, I've tried very hard to be "good." I was the only girl born between two boys and it was a matter of course that more was expected of me. At least, in my family it was. I am also a member of the baby boomer generation, growing up in the 50s and 60s. It was more of a paternalistic society back then and girls were expected to do what they were told and to take care of other people.

I was baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church, a cradle Episcopalian. In our home parish in Royal Oak, Michigan, I was a member of the junior choir and the junior altar guild. I especially loved singing in the choir, which we did in the big church once a month. Even at that young age, elementary and middle school, I had a strong faith.

But something happened to me as a young woman. I began to question God. I had doubts about his presence and was fearful of his expectations. Despite my early faith, I tended to see God as authoritarian and revenge-seeking and I was afraid of him. I was afraid he would take away from me what I loved best, if I didn't please him. My parents divorced when I was 14; this was at a time when divorce wasn't as common as it is now. As children often do, I often wondered if somehow it was my fault that they split up. Later, after I married and became a new mother, I had fears that something bad might happen to my baby if I wasn't "good." Needless to say, all this worry caused me to be estranged from God and it lasted for several years.

Today's reading of Psalm 32 reminded me of what happened to change the course of my faith. One time, after listening to an apologist on Catholic radio (I had stumbled on the station by chance in my car), the man I was listening to said that "Only those who are members of the Catholic Church and adhere to its teachings are saved." Or something like that. It scared me so much that I confessed to the Lord every sin I could think of, from long ago to the present. And a funny thing happened. It didn't happen right away but within a few days I began to notice how much better I felt and a wave of happiness swept over me. It dawned on me that what I was feeling was a result of my confession and the forgiveness of my sins. Then I knew what the psalmist says in Psalm 32: "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

Although I still have perfectionistic tendencies, I no longer need to fear God because "...steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord" (v.10).

Sarah Thompson

Psalm 30, 32

Haggai 2:1-9

Rev. 3:1-6

Mt. 24: 1-14

Sunday, December 12

Zephaniah 3: 19-20a “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered and I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home.”

One of the unexpected blessings of the COVID restrictions on in-person gatherings has been the new spiritual practice at St. John’s of virtual morning and evening prayer 4 days a week, plus noon prayer and compline on Wednesdays. Hosted by a variety of men and women trained in Zoom, these gatherings have allowed anyone who wants to worship, pray, and reflect together on Scripture to experience the joy of community during this time of isolation. Like faithful fans of a football team or a TV show, over twenty months we’ve become well-acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of the Hebrew Bible characters: obedient and disobedient kings being warned of God’s judgment by frustrated prophets, who also offer hope if the kings will change their ways. The book of Zephaniah encompasses the breadth of this warning-judgment-hope-restoration cycle, although it’s only three chapters long. Zephaniah also affirms to the ancient Israelites that “the Lord your God is with you” and will “take great delight in you” (v. 17) when those “who rejoice in their pride” (v.11) no longer are in charge. The New Testament readings fulfill this prophecy, underscoring God’s love for the oppressed and marginalized through the words and love of Jesus, who seeks them out—healing and blessing them, accepting and respecting them, giving them hope and guidance.

We’ve been hearing a lot recently about people oppressed and shamed in our modern world: the African Americans brought to this country as slaves, a designation so institutionalized into our political, social and economic systems that even now, 158 years after their emancipation, they still are not being treated equitably; the indigenous peoples, whose children were sent to inhumane boarding schools and lands taken through violence and deceit. Similarly, refugees who are dislocated from their countries because of war, severe climate disruptions, persecution or poverty lose their home, work and extended family as they live in the hope of starting a new life. The diocesan Refugee Resettlement office is expecting over 400 Afghan refugees here by March, four times the number predicted. Volunteers and resources are being sought.

Our times are filled with opportunities to reach out to others who have been “scattered” and “put to shame.” How can we best respond to Zephaniah’s charge to praise and honor the exiled? How can we show Jesus’ love to them?

The Rev. Jane Rohrer (retired)

Zeph. 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Phil. 4:4-7

Luke :7-18

Saturday, December 13

Zechariah 1:13 “And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”

Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon and some of the people had been placed into captivity in Babylon. Cyrus, the Persian king, had defeated Babylon, and had authorized some of the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. That work had been stopped, but Darius, who was now the Persian king, was going to allow that work to continue, as well as the rebuilding of the wall. Zechariah had a vision and was in communication with an angel about what was happening on the earth, and specifically about God’s judgment on Israel. What Zechariah learns in this conversation is that God will again show mercy to Israel; the temple will be rebuilt; and people will be prosperous; God will comfort His people and Jerusalem will be God’s chosen city.

I struggled with the readings for today because, with the exception of the Psalms, all the readings are considered apocalyptic; I asked myself, how can I meditate on “end-time” readings? When I separated the readings into verses, the one above captured my attention, and I thought about it in relation to what is happening in our country today. Just as Israel in the Old Testament is presented as God’s chosen people, we have presented ourselves to the world as the “model” nation of freedom; other nations should be just like us. But I look at our nation today, and I’m morose. I can’t watch the news, because it’s not news, just editorials based on which side of the political spectrum the news station is on. I can’t listen to politics, because neither of the two main parties are willing to serve anyone but their party. People are murdered on a daily basis; violence, racism, sexism, discrimination, xenophobia, etcetera, etcetera, are common. It is not uncommon to hear some people say we are, as a nation, under God’s judgment. I pray daily for the healing of this nation and I would love to hear “gracious and comforting words” about what will happen.

So, after this diatribe, what is my take on this verse? I have come to believe that it is individual behavior that can change the nation, so I ask myself “What can I do to bring about healing?” I can accept everyone for who they are, regardless of their beliefs, sex, race, gender, nationality, or whatever; I can help those in need; I can work on changing my behavior and viewpoints instead of expecting others to change; and I can remember that if I point the finger at someone else, three are pointing back at me and I should ask which of my behaviors should be changed.

Christopher Berger

Psalms 41, 52

Zechariah 1:7-17

Revelations 3:7-13

Matthew 24:15-31

Tuesday, December 14

Matthew 24:42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

A friend shared a story of walks she would take with her young grandson in a nearby woodland area. She would hold his hand, slow their pace, and tell him carefully, “If you are very still, you might see something. If you are very quiet, you might hear something.” In her own way, she was teaching this precious boy the way to contemplation and prayer in God’s great Creation.

The phrase that jumped out at me – that shimmered from the pages – of today’s readings reminded me to “Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

Although today’s verse is about the Second Coming, I believe that God in Jesus comes again and again to us every day. I believe the Divine Love of Jesus is alive in each of us – and oozes through all of creation. That annoying guy in the sports car (with a too-loud engine) who cuts me off in traffic? Jesus. That pushy woman in the shop who is desperate to get to the front of the line in the checkout? Jesus. The friend whose politics make me want to pull my hair out? Jesus. The Cruella De Vil inside of me who offers up a steady stream of self-loathing thoughts? Could she—and I—also be Jesus?

As I rush, hurry, worry, dismiss, or judge those around me while I get on with the Very Important Things I Must Do Today, I just might miss the most important moment of my day – the simple breaks in time when the Love of Christ shines through. I might miss that small, sweet moment of loving kindness I feel for Sports Car Guy when I ease off the gas and allow him safely into the flow of traffic. Or when I let Frantic Woman jump ahead of me in line – and she beams gratitude my way while explaining she’s late to pick up her kids. Or the moment when I begin to harangue my friend about his political views, and I suddenly see the small, scared child who still lives within him.

This year, as I enter with all of you into the season of Advent, I am mindfully creating more time and space to practice the many ways that I seek to center with God. Whether it is meditation or prayer, quiet time with nature, writing, or creative play, each of these practices helps slow my racing mind, expands my heart, and helps me feel closer to the Divine Love and Light that I have known since I was a child. I wait with each of you, in great anticipation, for the Light of Jesus to pierce the darkness and return to us again and again.

My friend and her grandson – who is quite a bit older now – were taking a walk near his home recently. He turned to her, held her hand and said “If you are very still, you might see something. If you are very quiet, you might hear something.” Keep watch, my friends.

Susan Trabucchi

Psalms 45

Zech. 2:1-13

Rev. 3:14-22

Mt. 24:32-44

Wednesday, December 15

Matthew 24:45-46 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”

The passage above from Jesus comes after he has given several examples of the importance of being awake because “You do not know the day that the Son of Man is coming.” (v. 42). After portraying the good servant above, he goes on to describe a wicked servant, who abuses his fellow servants, goes out and “eats and drinks with the drunken.” Jesus goes on to praise the good servant but rebukes the wicked servant.

The heart of this passage lies in the following words: “The master of that servant will come on a day when he (the servant) does not expect him....” It is easier to do the right thing when one is supervised, or in this case knows when the boss will return, but this kind of obedience does not come from free will. The truly good servant will do the right thing out of love for God and humanity. Here Jesus is nearing the end of his time as a mortal on earth. He is eager to stress to his followers, by means of harsh words, the dire importance of following the commandments of God and the words and exemplary behavior of Jesus.

My take-away from the story is this: I must be ever mindful of my actions, especially how I treat people. I am sure you’ve read the bumper sticker, “What would Jesus do?” but I think we might find it helpful every time we interact with our friends and family to check ourselves by asking: “What would Jesus say to me if I did this?”

Bonnie Rimawi

Pa. 119:49-72

Zech. 3: 1-10

Rev. 4:1-8

Mt. 24:45-51



Thursday, December 16

Matthew 25:13 “Keep awake then, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

These are the words of Matthew as he relates the story of the ten bridesmaids waiting to light the way for the bridegroom. Five were foolish because they forgot extra oil for their lamps and five were wise because they were prepared for the wait with extra oil. The bridegroom comes and only the five wise ones could accompany him because they had the oil for their lamps to light his way.

This is a familiar Advent theme, preparation and waiting. All around me lights prevail, on trees, houses, storefronts telling us it is time to get ready, “It is coming!” It seems inadequate to begin this reflection with a small candle lit with the light of hope as I prepare for His coming. I reflect on this light of hope that has kept me sustained through these dark days of pandemic, of fear, of grief. For my hope is based on God’s promise, “I am always with you”. I have refilled my lamp with that light of hope often over the past two years. Perhaps you have as well. It is hope that has carried us above the darkness of sickness and death that is overwhelming.

The world around us has changed beyond recognition, yet the familiarity of Advent stories that reassure us that in God’s time we will see the fulfillment of the many promises of God of sustenance, guidance, care and protection keep us faithful and compassionate. So, you and I wait, accompanied by our lamps of hope, and look beyond the bright lights around us to the heavens. We search for the Star that will light our way to the Child and a new time, a new creation that will be for us the Kingdom of Heaven.

Phyllis McCormick

Psalms 50

Zech. 4:1-14

Rev. 4:9-5:5

Mt. 25:1-13



Friday, December 17

Matthew 25:30 “As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”



As I begin my Advent devotional today a rainbow forms outside my window after a gusty rainstorm. This is a good sign. My story today involves three intertwining themes revealed in today's readings: music, money and grace.

Music: My Bible notes that Psalm 54 should be accompanied “with stringed instruments” and a “maskil of David” (or song in antiphony). This reminds me that music is my favorite part of Advent. It has always accompanied my personal Advent stories. My entire life I've looked forward to singing and listening to this season's music, whether the sacred or the secular. That said, I'm motivated to re-acquaint myself with my piano and make a little Advent music in this house, as I used to do

for my kids when they were little.

Money: Music often announces an important story, as it does in my meditation today. Matthew recounts Jesus's story to his disciples: *The Parable of the Talents*, a story of a master, his slaves and their money (talents). In usual interpretations the master is seen as a symbol of God; the servants are us; and the money represents God's gifts, which we are meant to use fully and multiply, as if to evangelize. Upon his return from a journey, the master highly praises the servants who had invested their money well, had conducted business at the market and multiplied their gold. He calls them “trustworthy,” and gives them job promotions. But the servant who had buried his money with no return on his investment is vilified: “You wicked and lazy slave” (v. 26). The master promises this poor slave punishment and “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” I worry about how the master could be so mean to the poor servant. For me this part of the parable illustrates certain disappointing features of humankind...paralleling significant disappointments playing out in today's world. Is this not how slave owners in America mistreated their slaves? I don't believe God has such punishing dominion over us. But let us make good use of the gifts God has given us.

Grace: Psalm 40 sings praises to the Lord, reminding me that the birth of Jesus is near. With his arrival will come Christ's grace to teach us, by his model, to love one another. “Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods” (v.4). “Revelation” talks about angels and “singing a new song.” Let my new song begin at the piano! Here ends the meditation.

Carolyn McConnell

Psalm 40, 54

Zech. 7:8-8:8

Rev. 5:6-14

Mt. 25:14-30

Saturday, December 18

Psalm 55:1-2 “Open your ears, God, to my prayer; don’t pretend you don’t hear me knocking. Come close and whisper your answer. I really need you.”
(The Message)

The author of this psalm is scared and looking for answers and/ or help. This person has a list of complaints with some imaginative suggestions as to how God can make things better. Who among us has not felt the same way? Afraid? Suffering? Wondering where God is? Where is help?

We are reaching the end of Advent; therefore, my thoughts turn to Mary and Joseph and their long and uncomfortable journey. I’m sure Joseph prayed his version of this psalm. He must have worried about his and Mary’s safety and what to expect once they reached Bethlehem. I imagine Mary was praying for God’s calming presence as she faced the impending birth of the Savior and all that it would mean. Meanwhile, others continued to pray for a Messiah.

Today, we look forward to celebrating Christmas. The easing up of the pandemic has many of us giving thanks and cautiously planning small gatherings with family and friends. We look forward to coming together for Christmas Eve worship, all the while praying that everyone stays safe—are you listening, God? Still others are worried about jobs, food, shelter, and other basic needs. How can we help, God? Some have health concerns themselves or are caring for a loved one who is sick or dying. Help us to reach out, God. Many are lonely or sad or may be mourning a loved one. How can we ease their pain, God? Please hear our prayers. Come close and whisper your answers. We really need you.

Dana Pitts

Psalm 55

Zech.8:9-17

Rev. 6:1-17

Mt. 25:31-46



Sunday, December 19

Luke 1:51-53 “He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

The latter section of today’s Gospel, verses 46-55, is called the “Magnificat.” You may know it from saying it as the canticle that often follows the Gospel at Evening Prayer. While I’ve said the Magnificat countless times, I had not noticed until now that the verb tenses switch from present to past tense. Mary begins her song of prayers saying, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,” then switches to the past tense. (See the highlighted phrases above). What is so strikingly odd is that Mary uses the past tense to praise God for things that have not yet happened. My goodness, she has months to go before she gives birth and she is thanking God in the past tense, for a yet-to-arrive good future brought by an as yet unborn Messiah, whose saving work won’t begin until he’s in his 30s!!

Apparently, ancient Greek and Hebrew share a way of speaking called the “prophetic perfect tense”—a way of speaking that communicates the conviction that newly emerging realities are so certain to bring about enduring change, that they are best spoken of as already having reached the fullness of their development. In this case, Mary is so certain that through her willingness to bear the Messiah, God is establishing an entirely new and eternal reign—the Kingdom of God—that she is thanking God for the new order that has yet to be born.

Does your head hurt yet?

Here’s why this matters to me, and may matter to you: the prophetic perfect tense has the potential to bring about deep transformation for our lives and our trust in God. So, this is totally new to me. But here’s what happened today. I woke up this morning feeling anxious because of how tired I felt after a couple of nights that were short on sleep. As I fretfully considered the day ahead, I had already determined it was going to be a hard and stressful day. Great attitude, huh? But then it occurred to me that I can pray to God in the prophetic perfect tense! And so I took a leap of faith and prayed:

“Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for the good, productive and joyful day that was today. I thank you for having made yourself available to me all through this day, and for giving me the grace to turn to you immediately on those occasions when my mind turned fearful, resentful or self-pitying. All through the day, you supported me and guided me with energy and calm. Thank you for doing for me today what I could not do for myself. Amen.”

How might your life and faith be enriched by addressing God in the prophetic perfect tense?

Michael Ryan

Psalm 80:1-7

Micah 5:2-5a

Heb. 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Luke 1:11-15 “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: 'Be not afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. '"

Luke starts by introducing himself and explains his qualifications for retelling the story of Jesus. He has a unique perspective as a Gentile, physician, and the first historian of the Christian Church. His concern is that the many eyewitness accounts are preserved and accurate for generations to come. He begins with the birth of John by recounting the angel Gabriel's visit to the Jewish priest, Zechariah. Zechariah is performing an incense ritual alone in the temple while others are praying outside. At first, he is frightened, but Gabriel calms his fears; and then, unfortunately, disbelieving Gabriel's message that he and Elizabeth would be having a son in their old age, Gabriel takes away his speech until John is born. The people waiting outside figured out from his gestures that he had seen a vision, but he still couldn't speak. When his time of service was done, he returned home; after which Elizabeth became pregnant. Elizabeth is grateful to the Lord for His favor and for taking away her shame. Some Jews at that time thought children were their hope for immortality, that children would take care of them in old age and add to their financial security. Therefore, children were a blessing and, thus, being childless was a curse.



★ I can't help it. Tears are filling my eyes as I look disbelieving at my daughter Emily and her husband Jon. We're all filled with emotions as I learned, after eight years of married life, that they were going to be first time parents. Their son Jackson, now 2 ½ years old, has been 'a joy and delight'. I can only imagine Elizabeth and Zechariah's excitement when they became expectant parents. I imagine their hope draining a bit after each year passed, yet they needed to wait. The time needed to be right for John to be born so he could pave the way for Jesus.

This Advent season is about waiting. Time never seems to drag more than when we have to wait. Whether it's waiting for a traffic light, or to open Christmas presents, or nine months for a birth of a grandchild, or centuries for the birth of a Savior. The world needed to wait a long time for God's Son to light the world. How has our waiting time during Advent prepared us to welcome Jesus with an open, loving heart?

Debbie Baxter

Tuesday, December 21

Titus 2:1 “But as for you, promote the kind of living that reflects right teaching...”

The verses from Titus offer us a guiding light through the perilous darkness of this pandemic. Older men are counseled to exercise self-control, be worthy of respect, be of strong faith, love and patience. Similarly, older women are counseled to conduct themselves in a way pleasing to God; a way that glorifies His name and his teachings, a way that is good and moderate in all things, especially alcohol and speaking evil of others. Women are also told to take care of their homes, nurture their children and teach them integrity; and to live in a way that is respectful and makes our homes and communities resonate love and the light of the Lord, a way that offers young people a role model for their children and their children’s children. People are dying on homeland soil at the hands of their fellow man because God’s Word is not being heard in the current clamor and rampant disinformation.

There is a one letter difference between *misinformation* and *disinformation*. It has to do with intent. **M**isinformation is benign. Regrettable, but no harm, no *manipulation* intended. It is the rampant **d**isinformation that is bringing our country to its knees, misguiding good people into doing bad things. In the melee, a new kind of graffiti is obscuring God’s words. God was stringently clear regarding His expectations of us. That is why these verses from Titus resonate so strongly with me. Instructions were being given from Paul to Titus, known for specializing in crisis management and resolution, for the criteria to be used in the selection of church elders: to focus on righteousness and avoid false teachers... to do good deeds and avoid foolish arguments; and to exhibit all the qualities our elected officials, not just church elders, but our country’s lawmakers should manifest; that *each of us* should manifest in our daily lives.

Every breath of life obligates each of us to act in accordance with the Father who created us and gifted us with the magnificence of all His creatures, great and small, in a home where Nature is meant to sustain us. The promise of a life hereafter is perpetuated in return for respectful conformity to a few simple doctrines that ensure the sanctity, safety and reverence for ALL *life* in ALL its manifestations. We are ALL God’s children. It does not matter who our parents are, or the color of our skin, or where we live, or what special proclivities we might have. Those are superficial distinctions that have no place in a compassionate and Godly mindset. Technology has made us a global village. Isn’t it time to simply do unto others as we would have them do unto us? Let go and let God? Work together to make a global village on earth patterned after the one we would want to share in Heaven? May peace be with us all.

Cara McKenzie

Psalms 66, 67

1 Sam. 2: 1b-10

Titus 2:1-10

Mt. 25: 14-30

Luke 1:39-40 “In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”

In the verses immediately preceding the above we learn of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, informing her that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit, a son who would be called the Son of the Most High. Alone and bewildered, confronted by the unimaginable and seemingly impossible, Mary's faithful response is all the more inspiring: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

However great Mary's fear and confusion might be, her faith is even greater. Joy will soon follow. But first there is a journey to see her relative, Elizabeth. Mary seeks the company of a friend.

Gabriel's message to Mary, profound and glorious as it surely is, could not have been an easy one to bear. It is not difficult to imagine the questions that might have raced through her mind. Unwed and a virgin, yet conceiving a son? How? Why? What will others, including Joseph, think? How will they respond? Great as Mary's faith is, these and many other questions might naturally have lingered, persistently gnawing at the edges of her mind. God understood this. And so we learn that He has provided Mary not only with the gift of His Spirit, but with the gift of another person's friendship, so that her faith might be nurtured and sustained from both within and outside of herself. God ministers to Mary's needs through His Spirit's presence in Elizabeth's life, as well as her own. He ministers to both their needs through their friendship with one another. "As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy," proclaims Elizabeth. It is a welcome that goes far to add to Mary's faith, replacing whatever fears and worries she might have had with her own unbridled joy. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," responds Mary, as she goes on to sing the Magnificat—her beautiful song of praise to God.

At this time of Advent, as we reflect on the past and anticipate the future, today's Gospel reading moves me to recall just how profound the presence of friendship in my life has been. On the all too many occasions I have failed to heed, hear or truly understand God's voice in my own heart and mind, when my faith has begun to flag or fail, God has often broken through to me through the lives of those around me, strengthening my faith and increasing my joy through the example and actions of the family, friends and even strangers in my life. The story of Mary and Elizabeth's meeting is a beautiful expression of true friendship and the bonds of support, community and communion with God it forges. Looking forward, it challenges me to consider how, with God's grace, I might become the kind of friend that Mary had and that God intends.

May friendship be an ever-present blessing in your life, as it has been in mine.

Paul Jensen

Thursday, December 23

Luke 1:63-64 “He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, 'His Name is John.' And all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.”

The family has come to witness the new baby's naming and was surprised to hear that he was to be called John, not Zechariah after his father, which was the custom. Zechariah's speech immediately returns, although he had been struck dumb previously.

The act of naming, fulfilling God's instruction, required that Zechariah recognize God's power to act in a human being. We too receive God's promise through faith, a gift from God. We can rest in this knowledge, knowing that there is strength beyond our own that works in us.

Sincere prayer is acknowledgement and thanksgiving for this gift.

Joni Pascoe

Psalm 80

Baruch 4:21-29

Gal. 3:1-14

Luke 1:57-66 hg



Friday, December 24

Matthew 1:21 “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

In our Preparation for Advent classes Canon John, Father Michael, Debi Laughlin, and I shared with you how the word “come” has been used in describing the preparation for Christmas; “O Come all ye Faithful” or “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” for example. Yes, God came down to us on Christmas as the Incarnate Word, Jesus the Christ, fully man and fully God. God *approached* us. God actually approached us four times; but do we recognize the other three Approaches of God?

The first was in Creation. In infinite love God made us for God’s self (*Book of Common Prayer, 362*). God approached us in goodness and love (*BCP 368*). God blessed us with memory, reason, and skill (*BCP 370*). God made all things and filled them with blessings, to rejoice in the splendor of God’s radiance (*BCP 373*). The second Approach is the Incarnation of Jesus which we celebrate on December 25. The third Approach is *now*; God is approaching us as our hearts are filling with the love of Jesus. And finally, God will Approach us *again* in the Eschaton: the end of all ages, the second and final coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God fully reconciled.

Mary was approached and she said yes. Three Wise Ones were nudged into traveling well before December and they approached. The shepherds approached. As we approach the newly-filled manger, may we ponder God’s infinite love and mercy: the enfleshment of God in human form as Jesus Christ. “...to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to the God and Father of all” (*BCP 362*).

Gracious God, I come to the manger with a little fear, confusion, and wonder. You came and died as a human like me so that I and all your creation could live forever with you in the splendor of your Kingdom. Lord Jesus, through the power of your Spirit, Come into my heart more and more; so that I may confess your name and live with you together in your love. Amen

The Rev. Missy Couch, Deacon

Psalms 45, 46

Baruch 4:21-29

Gal. 3:23-4:7

Matt. 1:18-25

Merry Christmas to you and your family!

