

The Best of All is, God is With Us.
An Advent Devotional for the Gathering Church

The Gathering Church

wants to be a listening, learning, praying,
growing, vibrant community.
We strive to be present to God in worship,
connected to each other in community,
& engaged in loving and serving the world.

More devotional materials and downloads
can be found at www.allgather.org/advent.

Advent Music from the Gathering Church “Christmas Nights” (2010)
is available to stream or buy at www.music.allgather.org.

Scripture quotations throughout are drawn from various translations and
paraphrases in order to provide the widest variety and freshest insight into our
Advent devotion.

Works from artists, professional and amateur, famous and not-yet-famous,
local and global, have been selected to accompany devotional material.

Devotional title is taken from some of John Wesley’s final words:
*“...he summoned all his remaining strength and cried out, “The best of all is, God is with us.”
Then lifting up his dying arms in a token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with a holy
triumph not to be expressed, he again repeated the heart-reviving words,
“The best of all is, God is with us.”*

Devotional cover artwork:
“Incarnation” (60”x46”) acrylic on birch panel, © 2009 Linda Ruth Dickinson.

Compiled and curated by Chris Breslin.
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O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell, Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

If we want to be part of these events, Advent and Christmas, we cannot just sit there like a theatre audience and enjoy all the lovely pictures. Instead, we ourselves will be caught up in this action, this reversal of all things; we must become actors on this stage. For this is a play in which each spectator has a part to play, and we cannot hold back. What will our role be? Worshipful shepherds bending the knee, or kings bringing gifts? What is being enacted when Mary becomes the mother of God, when God enters the world in a lowly manger?

We cannot come to this manger in the same way that we would approach the cradle of any other child. Something will happen to each of us who decides to come to Christ's manger. Each of us will have been judged or redeemed before we go away. Each of us will either break down, or come to know that God's mercy is turned toward us...

What does it mean to say such things about the Christ child?...It is God, the Lord and Creator of all things, who becomes so small here, comes to us in a little corner of the world, unremarkable and hidden away, who wants to meet us and be among us as a helpless, defenseless child.

[Dietrich Bonhoeffer]

This devotion is an invitation to get "caught up in the action." There are plenty of ways to approach this material, collected and compiled from two thousand years worth of Christian thought and writing, all trying to make sense of God becoming man in the birth of Jesus. One thing is for certain though, you are not doing it right unless you are truly interacting with it and enacting it. The good thing for us is that Jesus' birth (which has come to be widely understood as the *Incarnation*) models the most genuine, scandalous, and exciting example of interaction and enactment.

Jesus' arrival is the epitome of both God's love for human beings and each person's perfect loving response to God. For this reason, an Advent devotional should be an exercise in devotion with all that is within us: *heart, soul, mind, and strength*. As you journey through Advent as an individual, as a family, and as a church community, may you sing the songs, pray without ceasing, ponder the mysteries of God's love, and engage in loving and serving those around you, modeling in your life the Good News that "Best of all is, God is with us!"

Chris Breslin
Associate Pastor
Advent 2011

How to get the most out of this devotional.

This period of time before Christmas serves as a wonderful time to get specific: in our prayers, in our meditation on Scripture, in the ways we think and apply the Good News of Christ's first coming in our lives. This collection of devotional material will challenge you to be specific.

God has long instructed His people's devotion to be a whole devotion. Just as the LORD God is One, so too is our devotion to be one, engaging all that is in us: *heart, soul, mind, and strength* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-31). This devotion, especially shaped around Jesus' incarnation, must encompass all of this and all of us.

Let this devotion engage your **HEART**:

- Read these passages of Scripture focused on Jesus' surprising coming in the form of a helpless baby, and literally being "God with Us." Specific passages have been chosen that show God's heart for humanity. Dig into these *heart* passages deeply and watch as your heart responds to God's love.

Let this devotion engage your **SOUL**:

- Sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs that activate different parts of your soul. On Sundays, rest and worship God by singing with friends and family. Continue that momentum, by meditating on a Psalm, part of Israel's songbook, on Mondays. Let poetry, verse and visual imagery linger in your soul, so that "all that is within you" can respond with love and thanks to God the Father.

Let this devotion engage your **MIND**:

- Meditate with Christians throughout the ages on what it meant for God to take on flesh in order to be near us and among us in Jesus. These capsules display some of the greatest thoughts from disciples of Jesus throughout history and fellow Christians who are alive today. These quotations usually begin by just trying to grasp what happened in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago and what is happening when we celebrate Christmas, but they usually wind up in praise. Feel free to do likewise.

Let this devotion engage your **STRENGTH**:

- Since this whole season centers around the Word becoming flesh, God literally being with us, there will be action points throughout our study. These small incarnational experiments can and should challenge you to "flesh" out the implications of Jesus' birth. Participating in these *strength* experiments gives us the opportunity to be an "imitators of God" in our local settings (family, neighborhood, workplace). Loving God with our strength never disconnects devotion from action, or prayer from everyday life. Share photos and notes throughout Advent at emily@allgather.org.

Families

Alongside this devotional, there is a Children's Companion, [The Best of All Kid's Advent Devotional](#), featuring Scripture stories, room for illustration, and prayers, to help you include the whole family in this *heart-soul-mind-&-strength* devotion during this season. The Children's Companion includes songs from the Christmas Program and draws heavily on [The Jesus Storybook Bible](#) (by Sally Lloyd-Jones). This book is a fine tool for family devotions, and is available online and at most book retailers.

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.

*Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.*

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant light:

Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star.

Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear;
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear.

Sinners, wrung with true repentance,
Doomed for guilt to endless pains,
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you; break your chains.

Though an Infant now we view Him,
He shall fill His Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to Him;
Every knee shall then bow down:

All creation, join in praising
God, the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your voices raising
To th'eternal Three in One.

First Monday of Advent



“Restoration” (48”x48”) acrylic on canvas, © 2011 Ginny Chenet

Shepherd of Israel, listen!
You, the one who leads Joseph
As if he were a sheep.
You, who are enthroned
Upon the winged heavenly creatures.
Show yourself before Ephraim,
Benjamin, and Manasseh!
Wake up your power!

Come to save us!
Restore us, God!
Make your face shine
So that we can be saved!
LORD God of heavenly forces,
How long will you fume
Against your people’s prayer?

You’ve fed them bread made of tears;
You’ve given them tears to drink
Three times over!
You’ve put us at odds with our neighbors;
Our enemies make fun of us.
Restore us, God of heavenly forces!
Make your face shine so that we can be saved!

Let your hand be with
The one on your right side—With the one
Whom you secured as your own—
Then we will not turn away from you!
Revive us so that we can call on your name.
Restore us, LORD God of heavenly forces!
Make your face shine so that we can be saved!

[Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19]

Psalm 80 shouts a cry of desperation from someone who is at their end.

The writer knows their only hope is if God enters their situation and achieves their restoration and salvation.

Where, today, do you need God to enter your life?

Where has He come in the past?

What relationships need restoring?

What parts of your life need saving?

"Show yourself...
Wake up your power!
Come save us!
Restore us, God!"

God,
Be with us today as we make room for you.
Amen.

First Tuesday of Advent

A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ,
son of David, son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his
brothers.

Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar.

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Aram.

Aram was the father of Aminadab.

Aminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose
mother was Rahab.

Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother
was Ruth.

Obed was the father of Jesse.

Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon, whose
mother had been the wife of Uriah.

Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asaph.

Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram.

Joram was the father of Uzziah.

Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amos.

Amos was the father of Josiah.

Josiah was the father of Jechoniah
and his brothers.

This was at the time of the exile to
Babylon. After the exile to Babylon:

Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel.

Salathiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Achim.

Achim was the father of Eliud.

Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband
of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is
called the Christ.

So there were fourteen generations from
Abraham to David,
fourteen generations from David to the
exile to Babylon,
and fourteen generations from the exile to
Babylon to the Christ.

[Matthew 1:1-17]

It is easy as we're given this laundry list of names to flatten out the story that's being told here: Jesus coming amongst great expectation.

Fathers'-fathers'-fathers connect the dots of the story of God showing up personally in Christ with God showing up to form a people in Abraham.

Take a moment to pick a few of these names to find in the Old Testament. Pick a couple you know, pick one you don't and read back. Just like getting your own family tree together, you'll begin to get a fuller picture of the kind of folks God works through, folks as prestigious as David and Solomon, or as infamous as Rahab. Where is the *hope* of God bringing restoration and salvation most evident? Where does it seem most off-track?

God certainly uses imperfect people and far from perfect situations to work and bring about healing and help. Think of the real people in your life and in your past. What does your own spiritual genealogy look like?

Write a list of people who God has used (perhaps surprisingly) to bring Jesus into your life.

O God, You are our help. You are our helper.
To all generations You will be, forever and ever. Our shield,
and our eternal hope Oh Lord, You are the Ancient of Days, and
worthy of our praise.

Thank you for your faithfulness and
steadfast determination to be with us. Amen.

First Wednesday of Advent

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted.

[Colossians 1:15-23]

He by whom all things were made was made one of all things. The Son of God by the Father without a mother became the Son of man by a mother without a father. The Word Who is God before all time became flesh at the appointed time. The maker of the sun was made under the sun. He Who fills the world lay in a manger, great in the form of God but tiny in the form of a servant; this was in such a way that neither was His greatness diminished by His tininess, nor was His tininess overcome by His greatness.

[Saint Augustine of Hippo]

St. Augustine puts his finger on the mystery of Christ's birth: how can someone who is involved with making us become one of us? How can the One who fills all fit in a manger? This is like trying to contain an ocean in a water bottle.

While this might be a metaphysical mind-boggle, it is Gospel for us. It is good news that Jesus reveals to us, in the bodies that we wear and in the language that we speak, the greatness of God. It is good news that Jesus is more than big and great and powerful enough to expand into every dark corner of our psyches or friendships or habits or ambitions. It is also good news that Jesus actually being "God With Us" means that he understands us. He is small and intimate and empathetic enough to care deeply for us.

What in your life feels too big for God to fill with Christ?

What feels too small?

Handwrite a letter and mail it to someone thanking them for "imaging" God to you in the past. Reconnect with someone who has been influential in showing you Christ.

You Lord, from beginning to end, are Supreme.

You Lord, from beginning to end, are there.

You Lord, fill all and are in all. Let me make room for you.

You Lord, knit me in my mother's womb.

You Lord, know every hair on my head.

You Lord, are closer than I even knew.

Be near to me, Jesus. Amen.

First Thursday of Advent

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

[Hebrews 1:1-3]

Who ever saw, who ever heard of God in his infinity dwelling in a womb? Heaven cannot contain him, a womb did not constrict him. He was born of a woman, God but not solely God, and man but not merely man. By his birth what was once the door of sin was made the gate of salvation. Through ears that disobeyed, the serpent poured in his poison; through ears that obeyed, the Word entered to form a living temple. In the first case it was Cain, the first pupil of sin, who emerged; in the second it was Christ, the redeemer of the race, who sprouted unsown into life. The merciful God was not ashamed of the pains of a woman for the business at hand was life. He was not sullied by dwelling in places which he had himself created without being defiled.

[Proclus]

Have you ever heard about someone important so much from someone else, that you feel like you know them? What happens when you actually meet them? There is normally the momentary shock to your imagination, because you have envisioned one thing, but are confronted with the undeniable reality of the person in front of you. But then there is also already a familiarity, because of the expectation you have had. Once you've met, you can often look back and realize the ways that your memories or your own expectations distorted your picture, but also the ways you've been prepared and the table has been set for you.

God has always spoken to his people, through the Prophets and Law, but now by his own Son. What was once secondhand, now has to be firsthand. When you encounter Jesus firsthand, in what ways does He surprise you? How does God coming as a baby to an unwed teenager change the way we think of God being with us? In what ways does your picture of God need to be re-formed in light of these facts?

As an experiment in doing things first-hand, log how much time you spend communicating in second-hand ways (on Facebook, text messaging). You may be surprised. Take that time and purposefully double it with personal interaction/conversation time. As we celebrate and anticipate God being with us in the Incarnation, we learn to hear from God and relish and demonstrate being a "First-hand" People.

Father, when You speak, let us hear. Unstop our ears so that we'll take in Your Word. Jesus, when You show up, let us see You for who You are and not who we've made You out to be. Holy Spirit, continue to transform us by the renewing of our minds that we might discern God's will. good, acceptable, and whole. Amen.

First Friday of Advent



"Blind Man's Meal" Pablo Picasso, 1903.

Then Jesus said to them, "I myself am the bread of life. The man who comes to me will never be hungry and the man who believes in me will never again be thirsty. Yet I have told you that you have seen me and do not believe. Everything that my Father gives me will come to me and I will never refuse anyone who comes to me. For I have come down from Heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of him who sent me. The will of him who sent me is that I should not lose anything of what he has given me, but should raise it up when the last day comes. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and trusts in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up when the last day comes."

[John 6: 35-40]

It is easy in our time and in our society to forget just how elemental bread is. For most of history and most of time, bread was not just something that came in a basket before the main course, but *was* the main course. Bread is dining and sustenance at its lowest common denominator.

Bread also figures prominently in the God's story as witnessed in the Bible. From the oddly abundant manna stories in the wilderness when God feeds his people (Exodus 16), to the Passover meal (Leviticus 23), to Elisha's feeding (2 Kings 4), all the way to Jesus' feedings (Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew 15:32-39, Mark 6:31-44, Mark 8:1-9, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15), there is always bread. Bread is in Jesus' hands at the Last Supper he shares with his disciples before his death (Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-39 and John 13:1-17:26), and also at the resurrection meal with his disciples (Luke 24).

That Jesus would use such a basic food to describe himself is telling. He is humble and must even be broken before being offered for us. He, in His brokenness and in ours, is able to sustain, and shows us life-giving, overflowing abundance.

Bake a loaf of bread. If you've never baked before or if don't have a recipe, go to: <http://www.thefreshloaf.com/lessons/yourfirstloaf>. Notice not only the ingredients that go into this food (basic and elemental), but also the process, warranting both care and time. Reflect on why Jesus might use bread as a metaphor for his coming to us. Share your loaf with someone else.

Jesus, be our bread. Give us life. Swear us off the junk food that we consume, but that ultimately leaves us hungry and unsatisfied. Come into me and produce in me abundant life. Nourished by You, let my life be taken, blessed, broken, and given for the sake of others. Amen.

First Saturday of Advent

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples
—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

[Isaiah 11: 1-10]

What a surprising passage! What a jumble of images- one twist and turn after another!

A lively, hopeful, green shoot out of a dead, hopeless, lifeless stump!

Judging not by sight (think the realization of the American justice system's ideal: the blindfolded woman holding a scale), not by what things appear, but by what they are.

Setting things right with force, even violence, but doing so with words of truth, so that evil itself perishes.

Natural-born enemies living peaceably. We're talking food lying next to eater, without fear, without anxiety, without instinct for self-preservation. Isaiah shows us the leader of this hopeful picture: not a politician, an emperor, CEO, or power player, but a child.

Shocking stuff!

But it is this shock that becomes reality in Christ's birth in Bethlehem. And it is this unbelievable vision that unfolds when God enters into our situation in Jesus.

Things are not as they appear to be, and will not ever be the same!



"Fire from Rain" (30"x24") oil on canvas. Bonnie Perron, 2010.

Spirit of God, may you continue to surprise us. Bring forth life where there is death. Bring truth and worship into our lives where we think wrongly and do evil. Make us peaceful people, without fear or malice. Be with us as we follow Jesus. Grow our knowledge of the Lord as we bear witness to those who don't know the peace that Jesus offers. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent | Love

What Wondrous Love is This?

What wondrous love is this,
O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul,
For my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

When I was sinking down,
Sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down
Beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul,
For my soul,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb,
I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb
Who is the great "I Am";
While millions join the theme, I will sing,
I will sing;
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free,
I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free,
I'll sing and joyful be;
And through eternity,
I'll sing on,
I'll sing on; And through eternity, I'll sing on.

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heaven's all gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet-bards foretold,
When with the ever circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne

Thou didst leave Thy throne
And Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home
Was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
And in great humility.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest
In the shade of the forest tree;
But Thy couch was the sod,
O Thou Son of God,
In the deserts of Galilee.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word,
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn
And with crown of thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

When the heav'ns shall ring,
And her choirs shall sing,
At Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home,
Saying "Yet there is room,
There is room at My side for thee."
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

Spend some time assessing the "room in your heart." Can you sing this hymn honestly? Is there room? What else is in there this season that may need to be cleared out in order to make room?

Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to men a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

The shepherds heard the story
Proclaimed by angels bright,
How Christ, the Lord of glory
Was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped
And in the manger found Him,
As angel heralds said.

Second Monday of Advent

I will sing of the Lord's unfailing love forever!

Young and old will hear of your faithfulness.

Your unfailing love will last forever.

Your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens.

The Lord said, "I have made a covenant with David, my chosen servant.

I have sworn this oath to him:

'I will establish your descendants as kings forever;
they will sit on your throne from now until eternity.'"

Long ago you spoke in a vision to your faithful people.

You said, "I have raised up a warrior.

I have selected him from the common people to be king.

I have found my servant David.

I have anointed him with my holy oil.

I will steady him with my hand;

with my powerful arm I will make him strong.

His enemies will not defeat him,

nor will the wicked overpower him.

I will beat down his adversaries before him

and destroy those who hate him.

My faithfulness and unfailing love will be with him,

and by my authority he will grow in power.

I will extend his rule over the sea,

his dominion over the rivers.

And he will call out to me, 'You are my Father,

my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

[Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26]

“The psalms can stimulate us to raise our hearts to God and arouse us to an ardour in invoking as well as in exalting with praises the glory of His name.”

[John Calvin]

This psalm repeatedly refers to God as unfailingly faithful, the Hebrew word *hesed*. It also talks about a “faithful” people.” What does it mean for our faithfulness to mirror God’s: towards God and towards others. How can we, even in our brokenness, live out of God’s faithfulness and be a *Hesed* People, experiencing and expressing the kind of unfailing faithfulness that God showed when he came among us in Christ Jesus? How does the Incarnation of God, Jesus entering into our situation, give us access to this kind of faithfulness in our lives?

Fast for a day or two from listening to Christmas music on the radio, iPod, or CD player. Instead MAKE Christmas music! Sing. Play (or learn how to play). Even if your voice is bad, enjoy your ability to make music, to celebrate, and to participate in the coming of Christ. Or don’t. Instead, enjoy the silents that God is able to speak into and fill. Mute the deafening buzz that swirls around you in order to retune your hearing to the “still, small voice of God.”

Lord, you are faithful and have called us to be a faithful people. You have sent us your Son as the One who is with us and is faithful to us and for us. Show us what it means to be faithful like Jesus. Father, God, Rock of my salvation, give me confidence in Your steadfast love today and the confidence to extend that love to those who need it and feel far from you, though you are near. Amen.

Second Tuesday of Advent

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.”

And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

[Isaiah 7:10-16]

But the incarnation of Jesus expressed the being of God with us in a way that, while it had always been true for God, was not, before that moment, equally apparent to us. The incarnation marks the moment when God’s mode of presence moves definitively from *being for* to *being with*.

Being with can only be done for love. And in that, it imitates the way God loves us. God is *with* us, Emmanuel, for no other reason than that God loves us for our own sake. God enjoys us. That is the mystery of creation and salvation. That is the mystery that all our ministry, service, and witness must seek to imitate and emulate.

[Sam Wells]

Isaiah reports that the Lord Himself will give a sign to God's people. This passage continues to lay out the way this will happen: through a virgin bearing a son called "Immanuel."

Perhaps this concept is so routine to us that we forget how crazy of an idea this is! God, not just coming near us in some spiritual sense, but actually coming to us in a form that we understand and that understands us.

Isaiah even emphasizes how physical this will be by expressing that Jesus will eat of the "stuff" of blessing and provision that God gave his people in Exile.

To think that God might care enough about us to become one of us! To try to wrap our minds around the fact that God loves us enough to be with us!

Creator God, we thank You that You entered into your creation and triggered New Creation. Help us see that You are indeed for us, but more than anything, You are with us. You are with us in our hurts and insecurities. You are with us in our trials and temptations. You are with us in our weaknesses so that we may be strong in You. Let us live out of the life that You lived and have provided for us in the sending of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Second Wednesday of Advent

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, And they will call him, Emmanuel. (*Emmanuel means "God with us."*)

When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

[Matthew 1:18-25]

Imagine striking a match that night in the cave:

Use the cracks in the floor to feel the cold.

Use crockery in order to feel the hunger.

And to feel the desert -

But the desert is everywhere.

Imagine striking a match in that midnight cave,

The fire, the farm beasts in outline, the farm tools and stuff;

And imagine, as you towel your face in the towel's folds,

The bundled up Infant. And Mary and Joseph.

Imagine the kings, the caravans' stilted procession

As they make for the cave, or rather three beams closing in

And in on the star; the creaking of loads, the clink of a cowbell;

(but in the cerulean thickening over the Infant

No bell and no echo of bell: He hasn't earned it yet.)

Imagine the Lord, for the first time, from darkness,

And stranded immensely in distance, recognizing Himself

In the Son of Man: homeless, going out to Himself in a homeless one.

[Joseph Bredsky]

The irony of this passage: That Jesus' birth is presented as both something that his own human father considers humiliating and as an event foretold by the Prophet Isaiah.

How could it be both? Something to be swept under the rug because of the ridicule it might produce, while simultaneously ushering in the One who will "will save his people from their sins?"

How often is God's saving work in your life embarrassing and disruptive? How often do His plans ruin yours or at the very least surprise and interrupt what you have planned?

This week invite someone you don't know into your home. Host them for a meal or dessert. As part of your hospitality, be intentional about asking good questions. Move from What? ("What do you do for a living?") & Where? ("Where did you go to college?") to How? ("How did you come to be involved in _____?") and Why? ("Why do you love music/baseball/your kids/God... so much?"). Coming to understand, celebrate, and participate in Jesus' Incarnation means being intentional about honing the skills, practices, and space for being with people and getting to know and love them well. It means risking some awkwardness, being willing to be interrupted, offering your time and resources, and asking questions about them, instead of telling them about ourselves.

God: Save us from ourselves. Forgive us for looking in the wrong places for salvation.

Jesus: Help us to follow Your ways, even if they may be "humiliating."
Humble us with Your humble love.

Holy Spirit: Open our eyes to see where Your promises are being fulfilled among us.

Amen.

Second Thursday of Advent

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.

[1 John 4:7-19]

Sweeter sounds than music knows
Charm me in Immanuel's name;
All her hopes my spirit owes
To his birth, and cross, and shame.

When he came, the angels sung,
"Glory be to God on high;"
Lord, unloose my stamm'ring tongue,
Who should louder sing than I?

Did the Lord a man become,
That he might the law fulfil,
Bleed and suffer in my room,
And canst thou, my tongue, be still?

No, I must my praises bring,
Though they worthless are and weak;
For should I refuse to sing,
Sure the very stones would speak.

O my Saviour, Shield, and Sun,
Shepherd, Brother, Husband, Friend,
Ev'ry precious name in one,
I will love thee without end.

[John Newton]

This letter conveys a wonderful logic. If God is love, then those who know God must know love. If someone does not love, then they do not know God.

This formulation is pretty straightforward. What is impressive (mind-boggling, awe-inspiring, humbling...) is that God has first shown his love to us by action as costly as sending his Son to us.

The birth of Jesus continues God's gracious interaction with mankind and begins a seamless chain of events. These events: Jesus' birth, ministry, death on the cross, resurrection, and sending of his Spirit are all keyed on the fact that God's love shown to us in three dimensions cost Him everything, even His very life.

The message of this passage, then, is one giant "*therefore.*"

Therefore, let us love God and each other...

Therefore, let us continue to make visible what has been made visible in Christ Jesus...

God, we live in the overwhelming abundance of Your love and grace. Remind us constantly that our love comes from Your love and that it is made complete when it is the costly, fearless, selfless, thankful type of love with which You first loved us. Amen.

Second Friday of Advent



“The Fabulous Mystery of the Strip Mall at Night” (32”x42”) acrylic and oil on canvas, © 2011 Rachel Campbell.

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person’s failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

“This is the crisis we’re in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won’t come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is.”

[John 3:16-21]

We have no warmth in ourselves; it is true, but Christ came even in winter: we have no light in ourselves; it is true, but he came even in the night.

[John Donne]

Based on your experience, hopes and prayers, contemplate and finish the following statements:

“This is how much God loved _____: He gave his Son...”

“This is how much God loved the world:_____.”

“This is the crisis we’re in:_____.”

John’s gospel uses darkness & light describe “the crisis we’re in.”

What metaphor might you use to describe the world around you and its resistance and lack of receptivity to God? What metaphor might you use for your own rebellion?

Go somewhere you don’t often frequent, somewhere uncomfortable. Somewhere where people are restless or in distress. Somewhere where you can see people you don’t normally see. Go to the bus station or the courthouse, the grocery store on the other side of town, a public library, or a fast food restaurant. Read your Bible and pray. “People-watch” but do so while paying particular attention to those around you. Try to imagine what God coming into the world in Christ might mean, not just for you, but also for these people around you.

God, give us eyes prepared to see your light. Let us hunger to please you. Free us from our addictions to sin, evil, idols, and ourselves. Take away our illusions of “truth” and give us the courage to embrace and be embraced by the Truth given to the world in your only Son, Jesus. Amen.

Second Saturday of Advent

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[*Philippians 2:1-11*]

We see, at the same time, what sort of beginning the life of the Son of God had, and in what cradle he was placed. Such was his condition at his birth, because he had taken upon him our flesh for this purpose, that he might “empty himself” on our account. When he was thrown into a stable, and placed in a manger, and a lodging refused him among men, it was that heaven might be opened to us, not as a temporary lodging, but as our eternal country and inheritance, and that angels might receive us into their abode.

[*John Calvin*]

“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself..”

If Jesus (who, *Colossians 3:4* says, “is your life!”) took on your life, what might he refuse to “grasp at?” What do you regularly struggle to leave on the table?

Where can taking an “emptying” approach, “doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit” change the way you treat people

In your workplace?

At home?

At school?

On the road during your commute?

Jesus, I thank you for emptying Yourself. Give me that same mind. Let me be emptied so that You may fill me. Empty me of selfish ambition. Allow me to regard others as better than me. Give me a servant heart. Open my eyes to the interests of others, especially the interests of those whose welfare doesn't benefit me. Form my life in the shape of Yours, even if that be in the shape of a cross. Give me courage. Give me confidence, because You've gone before me and You show me the way. With bended knee, I praise You as Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent | Joy

Joy To The World!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven,
And nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods,
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

O Holy Night

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the Soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine,
The night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming,
Now come the wisemen
From out of the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our Friend.
He knows our need,
Our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break,
For the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

Joy Has Dawned Upon The World

Joy has dawned upon the world,
Promised from creation—
God's salvation now unfurled,
Hope for ev'ry nation.
Not with fanfares from above,
Not with scenes of glory,
But a humble gift of love—
Jesus born of Mary.

Sounds of wonder fill the sky
With the songs of angels
As the mighty Prince of Life
Shelters in a stable.
Hands that set each star in place,
Shaped the earth in darkness,
Cling now to a mother's breast,
Vuln'erable and helpless.

Shepherds bow before the Lamb,
Gazing at the glory;
Gifts of men from distant lands
Prophesy the story.
Gold—a King is born today,
Incense—God is with us,
Myrrh—His death will make a way,
And by His blood He'll win us.

Son of Adam, Son of heaven,
Given as a ransom;
Reconciling God and man,
Christ, our mighty champion!
What a Savior! What a Friend!
What a glorious myst'ry!
Once a babe in Bethlehem,
Now the Lord of hist'ry.

Third Monday of Advent

But joyful are those
 who have the God of Israel
 As their helper,
 Whose hope
 is in the LORD their God.
He made heaven and earth,
 The sea, and everything in them.
 He keeps every promise forever.
 He gives justice to the oppressed
 And food to the hungry.
The LORD frees the prisoners.
The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up
 Those who are weighed down.
The LORD loves the godly.
The LORD protects
 The foreigners among us.
 He cares for
 The orphans and widows,
But he frustrates the plans of the wicked.
The Lord will reign forever.
 He will be your God, O Jerusalem,
 Throughout the generations.
Praise the LORD!

[Psalm 146:5-10]

There's gonna be a great rejoicing
There's gonna be a great rejoicing
 The troubles of this world
 Will wither up and die
That river of tears made by the lonely
 Someday will be dry

There's gonna be a great rejoicing
There's gonna be a great joy river
There's gonna be a great joy river

 Questions of this world
 Someday will be known
Who's robbing you of peace
 And who's the Giver
There's gonna be a great joy river

 Someday you will find me
 Guarded in His fortress
 Open heart and wings
That never touch the ground
 Someday we will gather
 In a grand reunion
The debts of this old world
 Are nowhere to be found
 Are nowhere to be found

[Thad Cockrell]

What gives you joy?

Notice that this psalm directly connects joy to nearness to God.

Praise erupts and the descriptions that follow are all about the gracious gifts of God, how He acts towards us, His creation.

From creation, to promise-keeping, to justice, sustenance, healing, relief, unconditional love, protection, and tenderness, God's love towards his creation truly is an occasion for joy.

During the season of Advent, we affirm that God has come intimately near to us in Jesus and we rejoice!

Following the psalmist's lead, celebrate this joy by making a list of the ways you are joyful because of God's action. List some of the things for which you've trusted in Him.

God, You are not only the Giver but also the Gift! Only in You can I rejoice! I rejoice in the fact that You gave yourself when you gave your Son. Thank you for keeping Your promises, all are kept in Christ! Thank you for loving me while I am a sinner and ungodly. Help me to joyfully anticipate and live into the New Creation You are making. Amen.

Third Tuesday of Advent

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.



"Soliloquies: Joy" Makota Fujimura, 2009.

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* captures verse 4 of this passage in Isaiah as:

“Courage!

Take heart!

God is here, right here, on his way to put things right and redress all wrongs.

He’s on his way!

He’ll save you!”

This is what Israel looked forward to and what we remember when we celebrate Advent, Jesus’ coming.

It is a similar coming that we look forward to in the future. The coming of Jesus, again, to set things aright, to open eyes and dig out ears, to revive and refresh!

“He’s on his way! He’ll save you!”

Lord, let me walk on Your Way of Holiness. Set me apart from sin. Set me apart for You. Let me enter Your presence with singing, give me a taste of the joy that only You can give. Let my life now be a glimpse of the joy that I’ll experience with You in the future. Amen.

Third Wednesday of Advent

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.” When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come one who governs, who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

[Matthew 2:1-12]

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So how did it happen that this birth, this Jesus birth, managed to set so many of us back on our heels in astonishment and gratitude and wonder? And continues to do so century after century, at least at this time of year?

The brief answer is that this wasn’t just any birth. The baby’s parents and first witnesses were convinced that God was entering human history in human form. Their conviction was confirmed in angel and Magi and shepherds’ visitations; eventually an extraordinary life came into being before their eyes, right in their neighborhood. More and more people became convinced. Men, women, and children from all over the world continue to be convinced right up to the present moment.

Birth, every human birth, is an occasion for local wonder. In Jesus’ birth the wonder is extrapolated across the screen of all creation and all history as a God-birth. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”—moved into the neighborhood, so to speak. And for thirty years or so, men and women saw God in speech and action in the entirely human person of Jesus as he was subject, along with them, to the common historical conditions of, as Charles Williams once put it, “Jewish religion, Roman order, and Greek intellect.” These were not credulous people and it was not easy for them to believe, but they did. That God was made incarnate as a human baby is still not easy to believe, but people continue to do so. Many, even those who don’t “believe,” find themselves happy to participate in the giving and receiving, singing and celebrating of those who do. Incarnation, in-flesh-ment, God in human form in Jesus entering our history: this is what started Christmas. This is what keeps Christmas going.

[Eugene Peterson]

How often are you on the Magi's side of the story: seeking out, asking questions, gravitating toward Jesus?

How often are you on Herod's: troubled, fully aware, but completely discomfited that Christ's reign just might dethrone anything and everything else?

How ironic that Jesus enters into the world amidst strife and threat from authority and people unwilling to cede authority, considering his life ended under similar circumstances.

What is the most threatened area of your life that needs to be handed over to Jesus' reign? If you did this, what would be most affected by Jesus' reign?

Finances?

Sex and relationships?

Politics?

Identity?

Dreams for your future?

Walk the streets of your neighborhood. Pray for your neighbors. Be specific, use names and bits of information you know or have observed. Pay attention to the information you don't know about them. Use this as an opportunity and a starting point to form friendships and relationships with those around you. Since the "Word became flesh" and "moved into our neighborhood," our neighborhoods represent a great opportunity to witness to God's redemption of the world and his rule in our own lives through Christ's coming.

King Jesus: I believe, help my unbelief. I believe that You are worthy to be Lord over my life and Lord over all of creation. Reorder my unbelief and give me the courage to surrender those things that are hardest for me to let go of and lose control. Rule in my life and through my love and service to others. Amen.

Third Thursday of Advent

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

[2 Corinthians 8:9]

The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation...In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity . . . down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great, complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.

[C.S. Lewis]

With the way you currently view miracles or extraordinary “acts of God,” is it even possible to consider impoverishment, being poor, a miracle?

C.S. Lewis considers it the chief miracle of Christianity. That, in Jesus, God gets messy and deep in the complications of sin and death and in the realities of the world, in order to lift us up and bring us to Himself.

The Apostle Paul explains it as Christ becoming poor that we might become rich.

Let this fact, this miracle, work on your imagination.

If this is the case, how should I now think

about poverty?

about money and possessions?

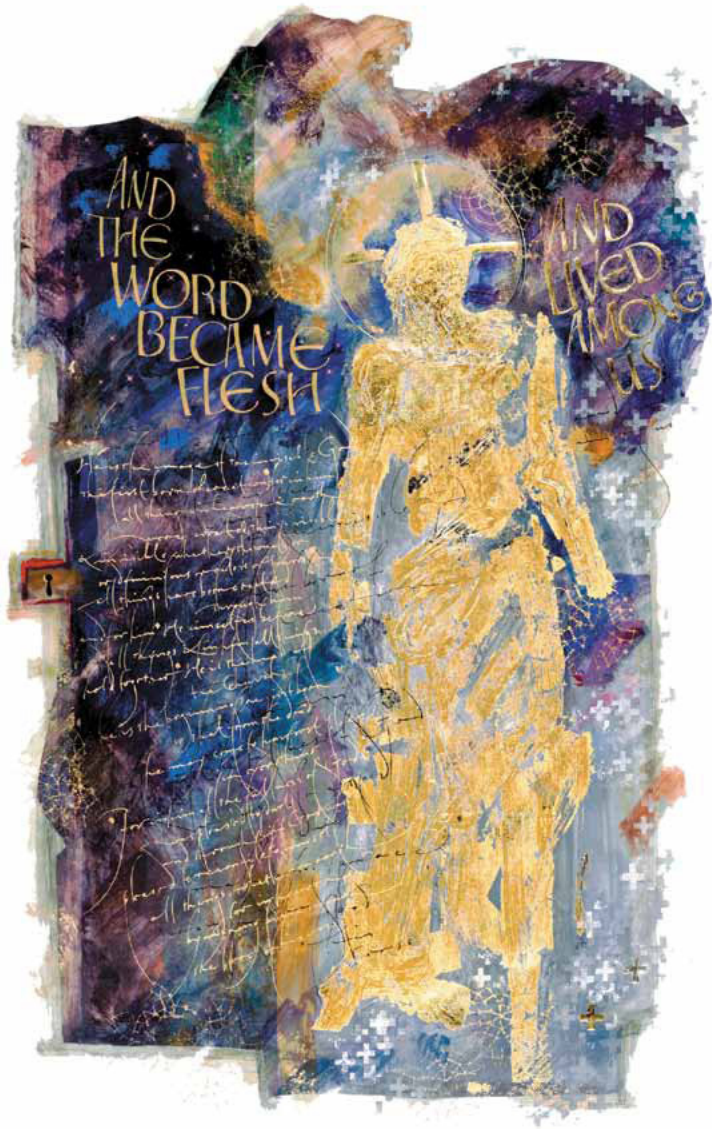
about saving and giving?

about feasting and fasting?

about God?

Almighty God, I thank You that, in your saving work and in Your love, You are so unassuming. Help me see You in the poor, and in my own poverty. Thank You for becoming poor for my sake and for Your prodigal grace towards me. Help me to always remember that when I am low, poor, and desperate, You have been there and are there in Christ to lift me up.

Amen.



“Gospel of John Frontispiece” *Saint John’s Bible*, Donald Jackson, 2010.

At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that Word, was with God, and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life and this life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.

That was the true light which shines upon every man as he comes into the world. He came into the world—the world he had created—and the world failed to recognise him. He came into his own creation, and his own people would not accept him. Yet wherever men did accept him he gave them the power to become sons of God. These were the men who truly believed in him, and their birth depended not on the course of nature nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.

[John 1:1-5, 9-14]

That is the puzzle of Christmas. John's prologue is designed to stay in the mind and heart throughout the subsequent story. Never again in the Gospel of John is Jesus referred to as "the Word," but we are meant to look at each scene—the call of the first disciples, the changing of water into wine, the confrontation with Pilate, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection—and think to ourselves: This is what it looks like when the Word becomes flesh. Or, if you like: Look at this man of flesh and learn to see the living God.

[N.T. Wright]

How hard is it to see when your eyes are used to darkness? It actually physically hurts. Your eyes squint to only let a little bit of light in. John's gospel describes Jesus' coming as Light that overcomes darkness: our sin, our weaknesses, our incomplete understandings. Where in your city is there darkness that could stand to be illumined by Jesus' love? Where in your family? What things do you cover up or push aside in your relationships? What needs Jesus' redemption and renewal? Where in your own heart do you embrace darkness? Where does it start to hurt when Jesus' light begins to shine in?

Work out, go to the gym, or go on a run. Whether you do it all the time or if it has been a while, get your blood flowing. While you work out, instead of worrying about what your body looks like (or what the bodies around you look like), consider the gift of your body, and the mystery that God would assume a body like yours when he became incarnate in Christ. What might that mean for the way we think about and treat our bodies and the bodies of others?

Jesus, may we look at You and see the Living God. Open our eyes and our hearts to You. Help us to recognize You when you put on flesh around us. Let us believe in You as You call us sons and daughters. We're able to be with You, not because of our own doing, but because You came to be with us. We thank You for this gift. Continue to be with us as we help the world to see what Your Body looks like in the flesh. Amen.

Third Saturday of Advent

But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted.

Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!”

Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.

[Galatians 4:4-7]

Adoption is, on the one hand, gospel. In this way, adoption tells us who we are as children of the Father. Adoption as gospel tells us about our identity, our inheritance, and our mission as sons [and daughters] of God. Adoption is also defined as mission. In this way, adoption tells us our purpose in this age as the people of Christ. Missional adoption spurs us to join Christ in advocating for the helpless and the abandoned.

Jesus reconciles us to God and to each other. As we love our God, we love our neighbor; as we love our neighbor, we love our God.

[Russell Moore]

Do you know anyone who was adopted as a baby?

Do you know anyone who has adopted a child?

At its very best, adoption can mysteriously and completely bring someone into a family to which they once didn't belong.

Scripture uses the metaphor of adoption to describe what happened to us when God sent his Son to become human. By his birth, and by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to become children of God in a way that's so intimate and humble that we can refer to God, the Creator of the universe, with such a playful title as Abba: "Daddy!"

Babysit for someone for free. Prepare some games and activities. Use the time as an opportunity for play and fun that you wouldn't normally experience. Spend this time relishing the metaphor that Scripture uses: our being adopted as children of God.

Abba Father,

I thank You that You have made me Your child.

I thank You that by Jesus' birth and Your gift of the Holy Spirit, You have chosen me and brought me into Your family.

Help me to be a thankful, generous, child-like follower.

Fill me with the wonder and reliance of a child.

Amen.

I Heard The Bells on Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Till ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

Beautiful Star of Bethlehem

O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shining far through shadows dim
Giving the light for those who long have gone
Guiding the wisemen on their way
Unto the place where Jesus lay
O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine on

O Beautiful Star, the Hope of Life
Guiding the pilgrims through the night
Over the mountains ‘til the break of dawn
Into the land of perfect day
It will give out a lovely ray
O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine on

O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine upon us until the glory dawns
Give us a lamp to light the way
Unto the land of perfect day
O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine on

O Beautiful Star, the Hope of Grace
For the redeemed, the good and the blessed
Yonder in glory when the crown is won
Jesus is now the star divine
Brighter and brighter He will shine
O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine on

O beautiful star of Bethlehem
Shine upon us until the glory dawns
Give us a lamp to light the way
Unto the land of perfect day
O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Shine on

Canticle of the Turning

My soul cries out with a joyful shout
That the God of my heart is great,
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things
That you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,
And my weakness you did not spurn,
So from east to west shall Your name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
And the world is about to turn!

Though I am small, my God, my all,
You work great things in me,
And your mercy will last
From the depths of the past
To the end of the age to be.
Your very name puts the proud to shame,
And to those who would for you yearn,
You will show your might,
Put the strong to flight,
For the world is about to turn.

From the halls of power to the fortress tower,
Not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears
Ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more,
For the food they can never earn;
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,
For the world is about to turn.

Though the nations rage from age to age,
We remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us
From the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This Saving Word that our forebears heard
Is the promise which holds us bound,
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,
Who is turning the world around.

Fourth Monday of Advent

Show us, O Lord, Your kindness
and Your rescue grant to us.
Let me hear what the LORD God would speak
when He speaks peace to His people and to His faithful,
that they turn not back to folly
Yes, His rescue is near for those who fear Him,
that His glory dwell in our land.
Kindness and truth have met,
justice and peace have kissed.
Truth from the earth will spring up,
as justice from the heavens looks down.
The LORD indeed will grant bounty
and our land will grant its yield.
Justice before Him goes,
that He set His footsteps on the way.

[Psalm 85: 8-13]

For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all. He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.

[*Saint Athanasius*]

*“Kindness and truth have met,
justice and peace have kissed.”*

How beautifully poetic is the psalmist’s description of exactly what Jesus’ coming means for humanity!

All of the love and truth that God is, has, and shows appears in Christ.

All of the justice and peace that the world is lacking has arrived when Jesus was born!

This is what we celebrate: that our rescue comes in Christ and that Jesus came among us to put an end to death.

King Jesus,
I thank You for “coming into my country.” Thank You for sending the enemy to flight. Let me remember that death no longer has any power over me. Awaken in me the abundant life that You’ve made possible. I’m sorry for the ways I still cling to old, dead ways. Help me to throw off these things and live wholly in You.

Amen.

Fourth Tuesday of Advent

When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the male children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet: *A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and much grieving. Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were no more.*

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. "Get up," the angel said, "and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead." Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

[Matthew 2:13-23]

He did not wait till the world was ready,
Till men and nations were at peace.
He came when
The Heavens were unsteady,
And prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need
Was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
Turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came
To a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
He came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
To heal its tangles,
Shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
The Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
To raise our songs with joyful voice,
For to share our grief,
To touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice

[Madeleine L'Engle]

Though Jesus is labeled the “Prince of Peace,” peace seems to be in short supply in the circumstances surrounding his birth.

As poet Madeleine L’Engle helps us recognize, neither the world, nor us, was ready for His coming.

What would it mean to be the type of person that not only welcomes Jesus’ coming, but longs for it?

What would need to change for His coming to be less an unwanted disruption and more Good News?

What relationships or social situations are you waiting for circumstances to change rather than entering into “when the need is deep and great?”

Prince of Peace,

You break into the world and into our lives when we are least peaceful and most restless. Disarm us with Your love. Dismantle our plans, our thoughts, our impatience, and our violence. Make us into a peaceful people patterned after You and not this cruel world.

Amen.

Fourth Wednesday of Advent

It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything.

The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.

Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

[Ephesians 2:12-18]

Heaven on Earth, we need it now.
I'm sick of all of this hanging around
Sick of sorrow, sick of the pain.
I'm sick of hearing again and again
That there's gonna be peace on Earth

Where I grew up there weren't many trees
Where there was, we'd tear them down
And use them on our enemies
They say that what you mock
Will surely overtake you
And you become a monster,
So the monster will not break you
And it's already gone too far
Who said that if you go in hard, you won't get hurt?

*Jesus, can you take the time
To throw a drowning man a line?
Peace on Earth.*

*Tell the ones who hear no sound
Whose sons are living in the ground.
Peace on Earth.*

*No whos or whys, no one cries, like a mother cries,
For peace on Earth
She never got to say goodbye,
To see the colour in his eyes, now he's in the dirt.
Peace on Earth.*

They're reading names out over the radio.
All the folks, the rest of us won't get to know
Sean and Julia, Garreth, Ann and Breda.
Their lives are bigger than any big idea

*Jesus, can you take the time
To throw a drowning man a line?
Peace on Earth.*

*To tell the ones who hear no sound
Whose sons are living in the ground.
Peace on Earth*

*Jesus, sing the song you wrote,
The words are sticking in my throat.
Peace on Earth*

*Hear it every Christmas time,
But hope and history won't rhyme
So, what's it worth, this peace on Earth?*

[U2]

“Peace to outsiders and peace to insiders.”

Now there is no outside. The walls, whether obvious or made-up are rubble. Christ has made peace.

Revolutionary.

Counter-cultural!

Even counter-church-cultural!

What walls do you put up?

Who is on your outside?

Who is on your inside? Who should be?

What do you need to do in your life, in your thoughts, in your actions to let your life better resemble the Reality set forth in Christ, who made peace, is our Peace, and called us to be peacemakers?

Bono prayerfully muses “hope and history won’t rhyme.” How are we to live in this apparent contradiction?

Lord, open my eyes to the people who are on the outs with me. Show me where I've erected walls and give me the tools and courage to tear them down. Thank You for including me where I was once excluded. Thank You for making me an insider to Your plan and Your promises. Thank You for blessing me, make me a blessing to others, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Fourth Thursday of Advent

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

[Hebrews 2:14-18]

O Son of Man, My Brother
Did you, in your judgment of grace
Trump Adam’s flesh by embracing it?
I believe

O Lover of My Soul
Did you, in becoming a man
And even the Man
Take on flesh exactly like mine
And even mine?
I believe

O Consuming Fire
Did you, in your incarnate passion,
Make war and make new my flesh,
Nailing the old to its final place?
I believe

O Risen Shepherd
Did you, in gathering us all in yourself,
Bring us home,
Where we share your life with Others?
I believe

As I walk out on this beach,
Skin glistening as far as the eye can see
I’m in awe

You became one with us all, and then...
Bone of our bone
Flesh of our flesh
True God of true God,
You put us in the truth
Beach brothers and sisters,
Can you believe it?!!!!

[Jeff McSwain]

The writer of Hebrews connects Jesus' Incarnation, his sharing in our humanity, with His ability to break the bonds of sin and death in our lives.

This is where the *rubber-hits-the-road* in God's plan for the redemption of His creation: that He might share in our humanity so that we can share in His Triune fellowship. For this reason, Jesus is our High Priest, one who connects us with God, but also One who prays for us, unceasingly, even now. What a thought! That Jesus not only knows what we're going through, but knows exactly how to pray for us, even at our most tempted, and how to open us up to God.

What are your greatest temptations?

What might you ask Jesus to bring to God on your behalf?

Who might you, following Christ, better get to know even and especially in their temptations, and pray on their behalf?

Jesus my High Priest, You know me better than I know myself. I thank You for freeing me from a life of slavery to sin and death so that I might know what living really feels like. Thank You for coming into this world and into my situation. Thank You for knowing every corner of my life and heart. Thank You for holding me up with Your prayer and bringing me into the presence of God. As You once prayed, I pray: "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one." Amen.

Fourth Friday of Advent

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
Forgiving one another,
as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us
And gave himself up for us,
A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[Ephesians 4:32-5:2]

We don't relate to God as a person on the first floor of a building relates to a person on the second floor. We relate to God as Hamlet does to Shakespeare. Hamlet's only way to know Shakespeare is if Shakespeare writes himself into the play. God has more than written himself into the story of this world. We are His incarnation.

[Tim Keller]

Kindness.
Tenderness.
Forgiveness.
Child-likeness.
Love.

Looking at Jesus' kindness, His compassion, the forgiveness offered by God in His life, death, and resurrection, how does your life imitate God?

Can we imitate God apart from imitating Christ?

What are some ways, just this day or this week, that you can more closely resemble God and walk in love?

You have permission to skip the last minute holiday shopping! Instead make some presents. Share in God's creativity, generosity, and redemption by making something for someone. Go to the Scrap Exchange, Good Will, or your own closet. Imitate God's incarnated creativity by being generative. Imitate God's generosity by giving of your time and creativity. Imitate God's vision by seeing something of little value as able to be transformed into a worthy gift. Get your hands dirty and let the Holy Spirit shape your imagination to see these possibilities around you, every day!

Loving Father, thank You for giving Your Son. Thank You for providing us with a picture of how to love. Guide me as I try to more closely resemble You. As Your child, I come. Craft me into a kind person. Make my heart tender and receptive. Help me know Your forgiveness, to ask for forgiveness from others, and offer it to those who wrong me. I thank You for the love You showed in Christ. Amen.

Fourth Saturday of Advent

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

[Isaiah 9:1-7]

We are to be like Christ in his Incarnation. It was unique, in the sense that the Son of God took our humanity to himself in Jesus of Nazareth, but the amazing grace of God in the Incarnation of Christ is to be followed by all of us. We are to be like Christ in his Incarnation, in the amazing self-humbling which lies behind the Incarnation.

[John Stott]

On this day, the eve of Christmas, perhaps we can understand to a small extent what it might have been like for all of Israel's hopes and expectations to be so close, at the eleventh hour.

When their Messiah was to come, he would offer peace. All of the strife and turmoil will be gone. All of the heaviness and stress will be lifted. All of the tools for destruction will be "fuel for the fire." Gone. No more. All of this achieved by the birth of a tiny baby in an obscure cave in the Bethlehem!

What's more is that we have a role to play! Because of this baby Jesus, we are now the ones that participate in this "government." We take our cues from this God-man! We have seen Christ in his first coming, and imitate him as we anticipate his second coming!

Take today as an opportunity to look back and to look forward: relishing God's grace and looking forward to the fulfillment of God's kingdom.

Wonderful Counselor: Counsel me in the ways of God.

Even as You became human, help me to be forged into Your likeness.

Mighty God: I praise Your power, and thank You that it is made perfect in my weakness.

Everlasting Father: Your kingdom will have no end.

Reveal all of the temporary things that I held on to instead of You.

Prince of Peace: Make me into a peacemaker. Help me forgive others as You've forgiven me. Grant me peace in my restlessness.

Amen.

Re-read the Christmas story
(*Matthew 1-2*)
with your family.

Reflect on your Advent journey, the places you've "gotten caught up into the action" and the instances where you've come to better appreciate and understand God's grace revealed in the Incarnation of Jesus.

Consider what you've learned, seen, and done.

Spend today feasting, praying, and praising with family and friends.

Continue the *heart-soul-mind-&-strength* devotion you have been practicing today, tomorrow, and the next, participating in the life made possible by the fact that God is indeed with us in Christ Jesus!

Directory of Resources

Cover

- Hurst, J. F. *John Wesley the Methodist; a Plain Account of His Life and Work*. New York: Eaton & Mains, 1903.
- “Incarnation” (60”x46”) acrylic on birch panel, © 2009 Linda Ruth Dickinson.

Introduction

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Christmas With Bonhoeffer*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2005.
- “O Come Emmanuel” 12th cent. Latin Chant.

First Sunday

- “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” Charles Wesley, 1745.
- “O Little Town of Bethlehem” Philips Brooks, 1867.
- “Angels from the Realms of Glory” James Montgomery, 1816.

First Monday

- Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19: CEB
- “Restoration” (48”x48”) oil on canvas, © 2011 Ginny Chenet.

First Tuesday

- Matthew 1:1-17: CEB

First Wednesday

- Colossians 1:15-23: MSG
- Augustine. “Sermon 187” from *Documents in Early Christian Thought*. Wiles & Santer. Cambridge Univ Press, 2005.

First Thursday

- Hebrews 1:1-3: NIV
- Proclus. “Sermon 1” from *Documents in Early Christian Thought*. Wiles & Santer. Cambridge Univ Press, 2005.

First Friday

- John 6:35-40: JBP
- “Blind Man’s Meal” oil on canvas, 1905 Pablo Picasso.

First Saturday

- Isaiah 11:1-10: ESV
- “Rain That Brings Fire” oil on canvas, © 2005 Bonnie Perron.

Second Sunday

- “What Wondrous Love Is This” American Folk Hymn, words attributed to Alexander Means.
- “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” Edmund Sears, 1849.
- “Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne” Emily Elliott, 1864.
- “Lo, How A Rose E’er Blooming” 15th cent. German Carol.

Second Monday

- Psalm 89: 1-4, 19-26: NLT
- Calvin, John quoted from Begbie, Jeremy. *ReSounding Truth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. Page 107.

Second Tuesday

- Isaiah 7:10-16: ESV
- Wells, Samuel & Marcia Owens, *Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2011.

Second Wednesday

- Matthew 1:18-25: CEB
- Brodsky, Joseph, “A Poem for Christmas” from *Nativity Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Second Thursday

- 1 John 4:7-19: NIV
- “Sweeter Sound Than Music Knows” John Newton, 1779.

Second Friday

- John 3:16-21: MSG
- Donne, John. “Christ the Light” sermon from *John Donne: Selections from Divine Poems, Sermons, Devotions, and Prayers*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990.

Second Saturday

- Philippians 2:1-11: NRSV
- Calvin, John. Commentary on Luke 2:1-7.

Third Sunday

- “Joy To The World” Isaac Watts, 1719.
- “Oh Holy Night” Placide Cappeau, 1847.
- “Joy Has Dawned Upon the Earth” Keith Getty & Stuart Townend © 2004.

Third Monday

- Psalm 146:5-10: NLT
- “Great Rejoicing” Thad Cockrell © 2009.

Third Tuesday

- Isaiah 35: 1-10: NIV
- “Soliloquies: Joy” © 2011 Makota Fujimura

Third Wednesday

- Matthew 2:1-12: CEB
- Eugene Peterson,

Third Thursday

- 2 Corinthians 8:9: ESV
- Lewis, Clive Staples. *Miracles*

Third Friday

- John 1:1-5, 9-14: JBP
- “Gospel of John Frontispiece” from the *Saint John’s Bible*. Donald Jackson, 2010.
- Wright, Nicholas Thomas. From *What is This Word?* sermon given on Christmas Morning 2005 in the Cathedral Church of Christ, Durham, England.

Third Saturday

- Galatians 4:4-7: CEB
- Moore, Russell. *Adopted For Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.

Fourth Sunday

- “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” Henry Longfellow, 1864.
- “Beautiful Star of Bethlehem” A.L. Phipps.
- “The Canticle of the Turning” Hal Hopson, 2005.

Fourth Monday

- Psalm 85:8-13: Alter
- Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: Popular Patristics Series*. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996.

Fourth Tuesday

- Matthew 2:13-23: CEB
- L’Engle, Madeline “First Coming” from *The Ordering of Love*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2005.

Fourth Wednesday

- Ephesians 2:12-18: MSG
- “Peace on Earth” U2, 2000.

Fourth Thursday

- Hebrews 2:14-18: NIV
- McSwain, Jeff. *Movements of Grace: The Dynamic Christo-realism of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Torrances*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010.

Fourth Friday

- Ephesians 4:32-5:2: ESV
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Fourth Saturday

- Isaiah 9:1-17: NIV
- Stott, John. From a speech given at the 1997 Keswick Convention before his retirement from public ministry.

Alter= Robert Alter’s Translation of the Psalms
CEB= Common English Bible
ESV= English Standard Version
JBP= J.B. Phillips’ New Testament in Modern English
MSG= The Message Paraphrase by Eugene H. Peterson
NIV= New International Version
NLT= New Living Translation
NRSV= New Revised Standard Version



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