



**THE 2024 ANGLICAN PROVINCE OF  
AMERICA**

# **Advent Devotional**

Presented by the Deanery of Appalachia

# **2024 Advent Devotional**

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**Edited *by* Father Paul Rivard,  
Dean of Appalachia**

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Cover Art - *The Journey to Bethlehem* (1865)  
by Adolf Joseph Weidlich (1816 - 1885)

In memory of  
The Right Reverend Robert  
and Emily Loiselle

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

*O come, thou Day-spring from on high,  
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadow put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!*

Latin, 9th Century  
(1940 Episcopal Church Hymnal, Number 2)

## Prologue

The season of Advent is not the most difficult to understand, but it is perhaps the most difficult to faithfully observe. It is a penitential season to be accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, both hearkening back to Christ's first advent and anticipating his second. Yet, it occurs during a time when the popular culture is absolutely swimming in too-early Christmas celebrations. Against the solemn themes of Advent has been erected a barricade fashioned of candy-canes, tinsel, and peppermint lattes.

Nevertheless, it is during this "little Lent" of weeks leading up to Christmas that Christians are given a chance to fast before the feast. It is here that we are challenged to give alms greater than we normally might. It is now that we set ourselves to fervent prayer.

Meditations in this devotional have been contributed by clergy, deaconesses and others who work diligently for the Kingdom of God in the Anglican Province of America. Their works follow the passages appointed in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer lectionary for Morning and Evening Offices and are meant to enhance your rule of life for the next weeks. As this devotional is presented by the Appalachian Deanery, let me express our hope that the season of Advent will prove to be a time of honest and meaningful preparation for the Feast of the Incarnation. I pray that when we all finally sing "the Lord is come," that it will be a feast of true joy and peace to each one of you, and in the grandest way "joy to the world" indeed.

Father Paul Rivard

Dean of Appalachia, Rector of Saint George the Martyr  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 1 - Sunday, December 1

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Hebrews 12:14ff

*“Yet once more’, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”*

(Hebrews 12:27)

**T**he age-old problem for fallen man, poignantly troubling to the pious Ancients, and virtually unknown to post-modern Christians, is the question of the one and the many. The idea comes from Plato and basically sums up the predicament of how two radically alien and separated dimensions or natures can relate. In simpler terms, how can God and Man come together, be one, or even interact in an imperfect way - at least, from the side of man? Plato, along with Aristotle, his greater student, thought that ultimate and eternal reconciliation between the two was doubtful and unlikely. What they did contribute to philosophy, however, was what we might call a second best, or a way to translate the Divine Nature into human virtue for as long as man lives.

The ancients were wise. Plato and Aristotle were searchers and seekers who never stopped wondering in awe at the marvel of the universe and the mystery of the human soul. They studied what was available to men in all ages, that is, Nature and Man’s Thinking of it. What they said with certainty was always based on the mind’s journey from Nature to God. To them, God’s Being was the Thinking that informs and defines all Nature.

So, what has this got to do with Advent? Well, in a sense, everything. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews was, no doubt, a Platonist. For some period of his life, he must have lived in painful tension between the God he knew and the man he was, between God's thinking of all being, and his feeble imitation of it. Perhaps, with awe, he wondered if man and God might meet beyond time and space in a life that moved from death to new life with God forever.

What we do know is that he found a solution to his problem. Where his mind failed, his faith was born, as he discovered a record of the Advent of God's Son. What he found was that God Himself, in the Person of Christ, came down from Heaven to translate the Divine Word into human life perfectly to reconcile man to God. What he found too was that man's proclivity to sin, always shaken, disturbed, and distracted with what passes away, was the real barrier to man's union with God. But in the Advent of Jesus Christ, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews found a Person who was one with Himself in the division of Thought and Nature. He found that what is divided by man's sin is united by Christ, not only to be known from a distance but to be lived concretely, embraced in time and space for the purpose of eternal communion with the Father, with a faith which cannot be shaken because God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves (AA, Big Book). Now man can translate God's Being and Thinking, in Jesus Christ, into the means of Grace and the hope of glory.

Father William Martin  
Saint Michael and All Angels Anglican Church  
Arden, NC

# Advent 1 - Monday, December 2

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 1:1-13

*“As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”*

(Mark 1:2,3)

**J**ohn the Baptist was an interesting fellow. His mother was the cousin to our Lord’s mother. He is also considered the last of the Old Testament prophets, even though his story takes place in the New Testament. John dressed weird and ate a strange diet. This made him iconic in many ways. He was also bold and brave. He was not afraid to tell the elite, the powerful, and the people of his day the truth of God. Not only did he speak the truth, but he also lived it. The reason he was bold is that he knew his purpose in life was to prepare the way of the Messiah and to announce that He was coming. His life’s work was given to him before he was even born. Along with knowing his purpose, his true strength came from God. John kept focus was on God, and God alone. He looked up to Heaven instead of looking down at the earth. God was his standard, not man.

These verses are as much a call to action for the modern Christian as they were for John. We all know that the world in which we live is dark and full of sin. Like John, it is our job as Christians to bring the light of Christ to those around



us. This is job is a calling for us all, clergy and laity alike. We have no choice in this if we truly love our Lord as we are supposed to. Our call is to prepare the way of the Lord and to make his paths straight. This means we are to be a witness of God in both our speech and our actions. The world is desperately seeking God. While it appears that the world is against the Church, it truly wants the people of God to live out the Truth.

The way we can live out this calling from God is to stay connected to Him. As Anglicans, we are blessed to have a rich heritage and tradition with the Book of Common of Prayer. The BCP gives us daily scripture readings and prayers to order our lives and stay connected to God. Praying the offices and reading the appointed scriptures gives us a rhythm of life that empowers us to stay true to the teachings of our Lord. Staying plugged into the Holy Trinity, is the only way in which we can successfully live out the Christian life. We must follow the example of John by looking to Christ, who is the author and perfecter of our faith, and sharing that faith with the world.

Deacon Jason McInnis  
St. Columba's Anglican Church  
Shreveport, LA

# Advent 1 - Tuesday, December 3

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Evening Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 2:1-5

*“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”*

(Isaiah 2:4)

**A**dvent is a time when I can feel stuck between two worlds. The lessons and readings call us to pause and prepare for the coming of Christ through repentance, the images are of judgement and the promise of Christ’s return. However, the images in the world around us push us to rush past this and gather around the manger at Christmas. In rushing past, we can miss the full hope of what a redeemed world and order will be.

The lesson from Isaiah was made famous in the 20th century as a reference to the founding of the League of Nations and was also referenced in the charter of the United Nations. In 1959, the Soviet Union donated a statue of a blacksmith beating a sword into plowshares. The United Nations was created with the hope that this passage would become a reality in our time. However, that reality has not materialized. Just before sitting down to write this devotional, I attended a meeting that was completely dedicated to learning war and “lifting up a sword” against another nation (I currently serve as a military chaplain).

In this in between time of looking back to the manger, while looking forward to the return of Christ, it may seem hopeless to repeat this passage of scripture. However, we can be an image of a redeemed world, by living as redeemed people. We can be people of hope, people of peace and people of reconciliation.

The Christian layman Shane Claiborne lives and ministers in the inner city of Philadelphia to those impacted by violence and calls those impacted to choose peace over retaliation. Chaplain (Fr) Emil Kapaun gave food, mediated disputes, and proclaimed hope in a POW camp in Korea until he died from disease. His fellow POW members said he never gave in to despair or hatred. Dr David Augsburg has provided pastoral care and counseling to thousands who are struggling under the weight of heartache and pain to find freedom in forgiveness and peace.

These are just three short examples. There are many, many others who we could name, and a great multitude who we do not know, who showed the hope of peace to a world torn apart by violence. They provided another way because they knew that one day God will judge, and He will set things right.

One day we will truly lay down our arms and not learn war anymore. Until that glorious day, may we live out and show the world around us the hope of peace that is to come.

Father Jamie Danford  
Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church  
Warner Robins, GA

# Advent 1 - Wednesday, December 4

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## Morning Prayer - Psalm 9

*“But the LORD shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgement. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, and minister true judgement unto the people.”*

(Psalm 9:7-8)

**T**he word “advent” means coming or arrival. Therefore, during the season of Advent we prepare for our Lord’s arrival (His advent) on Christmas as well as our Lord’s second coming (His advent) on the Day of Judgement. Yet how does our Lord Himself prepare for His very own advent? In Psalm 9:7 we read, “But the LORD shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgement.” So how did God prepare His throne for judgement?

First, God prepared His throne for judgment by creating it, by creating the heavens and the earth. In Isaiah 66:1 we read, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.’” But what good is a throne without a flesh-and-blood king to sit upon it? Therefore, God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ. This was first prophesied in Genesis 3:15 when God told the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed.” Later in 2nd Samuel 7 God told King David that this Promised Seed would be someone from his own bloodline to sit on Israel’s throne forever. And in Luke 2:21-33 the angel Gabriel told Mary, “And behold, you will

conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” Forty days after our Lord’s death and resurrection, Mary’s Son ascended to heaven’s throne to rule over all and one day He will return to judge the quick and the dead. This is how the Lord “hath prepared his throne for judgment”. First, He created the throne. Second, He became man to justly sit on it in judgement over men.

Therefore, let us prepare for our Lord’s advent on Christmas and on Judgement Day by following His example. First, let us prepare God a throne in our hearts and lives by repenting and turning to Him in worship and prayer. Second, let us strive to be holy as He is holy. For God became man in order that man might become more like God. This is why Hebrews 4:15-16 reads, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” And this is why the Psalmist says, “But the LORD shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgement. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, and minister true judgement unto the people.”

Father Randall Russell  
Saint Philip’s Anglican Church  
Blacksburg, VA

# Advent 1 - Thursday, December 5

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## Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 4

*“Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flame of fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion. It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”*

(Isaiah 4:5,6)

**A**s we reflect upon the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ this new church year let us remember that Jesus is all about the opposites. We see here in Isaiah that God is going to “wash away their filth” just as he cleansed the leper in the second lesson from the Gospel of Mark (1:40). Jesus on the other hand is made filthy in his own blood. The “bloodstains” of Jerusalem on the other hand are washed in the Isaiah passage from today. Jesus is homeless when he comes into the world. But in Isaiah “all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion.”

And yet where is this pavilion and canopy? Where is the “refuge and shelter from the storm and rain”? This brings us to the maxim of already, not yet. There is a very real sense that salvation has already been accomplished. The baby Jesus has been born, crucified, resurrected and ascended. He rules and reigns the universe. But the day-to-day experience of the Christian is often fraught with pain, suffering and doubts. How does one get under that canopy

that protects us from the storms and rains of life? Some are wont to say “that all of that is in the future” and there is some truth to that. Someday our faith will be sight. But sight can be something we do not want to depend upon. We live by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The great men and women of the faith who won the crown of martyrdom can testify, and did, that they lived (and died) under the “canopy” that God provided that served as a refuge and shelter from the storms of life.

It may seem that we are back to the opposite world. But if we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 2:12), we can live in the here and now in the canopy. Someday the storms will be gone. Someday the canopy will be visible to the eye. In the meantime as we travel through this world as pilgrims and wanderers making our way to our own country, the heavenly one. We need to fix in our minds the very real present reality that the long expected Jesus has come into the world and there is nothing to fear. Jesus split time in two, to place a canopy over your head to shade you from the heat and to provide a refuge and shelter from the storm and the rain. Keep your eyes on Jesus no matter what happens.

Father David Hodil  
Saint Paul’s Anglican Church  
Crownsville, MD

# Advent 1 - Friday, December 6

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Isaiah 6:1-11

*“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.”*

(Isaiah 6:8)

**I**f we were to analyze God’s redemption of humanity, a chief theme we would notice would be how judgement precedes blessing. We must continually keep this in mind during Advent. It is in this time we reflect and judge ourselves and meet on the Lord’s Day, so that the Mass or the Eucharistic celebration becomes our judgement. That is where we sacrifice ourselves before God in response to his judgement.

Isaiah begins telling us his vision and through that we see the correlation between the First Lesson and the Second Lesson. In both lessons the author has a vision and sees the worship of God. In Isaiah, he sees the Lord is on his throne and above all the host of heaven, and they sing the Sanctus which we join in on each Mass as we witness the answer to our prayer, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The vision that Isaiah saw was of Christ sitting upon the throne. Then he hears the penetrating question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” In the Gospel of St. John, Chapter 17, we see an intimate prayer that Christ is praying to our Father. In verse 18b Christ prays “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” Prior to the summer in St. John’s



Wednesday night study, Fr. Mark Menees led the discussion of the different views regarding the relationship between Christians and the world. St. John in his Gospel tells us of Christ's prayer to the Father, not that we are removed from the world, but that we are protected from the evil in the world. In those discussions oftentimes discussions revolved around grappling with the question ... "How does a good God allow evil to exist?" I have often wrestled with that question, but if we consider the Augustinian perspective, it is understandable. St. Augustine said that we are the reason that God permits evil to exist. He reasoned that when Adam sinned and humanity fell, sin passed to all men and so, if God were to eliminate evil then we would be eliminated along with it. God means for us to be redeemed, not destroyed.

This Advent, we proceed forward, looking toward the celebration of Christmas, and the Second Coming of Christ. Each day shall we say as the psalmist "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps 42:1-2). Long to be in worship at church and in the New Jerusalem. Let us lightly cling to our belongings and cast-off unnecessary baggage that distracts us from communing with God and each other. Let us be the "seed that shall serve him;" and "declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this" (Ps 22: 30-3). Amen.

Deacon Kevin Isley  
Saint John's Anglican Church  
Greensboro, NC

# Advent 1 - Saturday, December 7

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 7:1-9

*“Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son...and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.”*

(Isaiah 7:3-4)

**A**haz was the 12th King of Judah, the son of Amaziah, the grandson of Uzziah. He began his kingship in the 17th year of the reign of King Pekah of Israel, son of Remaliah in the second half of the eighth century BC (744-730). The prophet Isaiah was one of his advisors.

The Kings of Israel and Syria were pressuring Ahaz to join them in an alliance against the re-ascendant Assyrians ruled by Pul/Tiglath-Pileser III who was assembling an army to invade from the North. Isaiah urged Ahaz to rebuff the offer (and threat) and to avoid all foreign entanglements, predicting the end of the threat to Judah from those two kingdoms. He requested that Ahaz ask for a sign to show that this prophecy/counsel was true, but the king of Judah abjured any such sign. His fear of the kings of Israel and Syria led him to grasp at salvation through... Tiglath-Pileser. The Assyrian came and delivered Judah from both kings, in the process deporting the people of Israel. Ahaz became first a tributary to Assyria and then a

slavish devotee of foreign cults which he transposed to Jerusalem to further corrupt the worship of Yahweh (II Kings 16).

This is of a piece with Solomon building places to worship Ashtoreth at the urging of his wives and the general whoring after the idols of their surrounding compatriots to which the Israelites were prone. Manasseh, the grandson of Ahaz, would bring idol worship to a grim apotheosis—erecting altars to Baal, dedicating groves, setting up altars to the ‘starry host’ in the Temple of the Lord. He offered his son up to Molech via fire and practiced divination and communion with spirits (II Kings 21). These violations of the covenant by Manasseh, coupled with what the people of Judah had been doing all along brought about the end of Judah and their captivity in Babylon.

Ahaz told Isaiah that he would not tempt the Lord by asking a sign from him, but this was only apparent abnegation as he already knew he was going to reject Isaiah’s divinely inspired advice and instead play power politics. Isaiah rebukes the King’s folly, “Hear ye now O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” It is the faithfulness of God that keeps His people safe, not the faithfulness of His people to Him.

Deacon Gene Godbold  
All Saints Anglican Church  
Charlottesville, VA

# Advent 2 - Sunday, December 8

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Epistle for Holy Communion - Romans 15:4ff

*“WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

(Romans 15:4)

**T**oday is known as “Bible Sunday” throughout the Anglican world. Bible Sunday reminds us the Anglican Church is very much a child of the Reformation, even as we seek to preserve our catholicity.

The Anglican view of Scripture is clearly demonstrated by the oath our clergy take in their Ordinations:

Bishop. “Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all Doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the same Holy Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach or maintain nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the same?”

To which the candidate replies: “I am so persuaded, and have so determined, by God's grace.”

The point of this question and answer is to establish the candidate's belief that everything necessary to salvation is contained in the Bible, and nothing besides what is contained in the Bible is necessary to salvation. This, of course, leaves an enormous number of ideas and

information which may be edifying or helpful or inspiring are not in the Bible, but no clergyman, of for that matter, no laymen either, should ever consider or force those things on others as being necessary for salvation.

There is also the problem of how the Scriptures should be interpreted. In our claim to be presenting the Faith of the Undivided Church, we look to the teaching of the Undivided Church to discern the consensus, to the extent a consensus exists, of the writings of the Fathers and Doctors, the Ecumenical Councils, and the Ancient Liturgies of the Church to guide us in our interpretation of the Scriptures. The old saying is a good one, we read the Holy Scriptures “over the shoulders of the Fathers.”

Finally, of course, we are left with our own reason. We must always remember our reason is fallible and should never be treated as authoritative. Any personal interpretation of Scripture which contradicts the clear teaching of the Undivided Church must be treated as erroneous; indeed, believing something which contradicts the teaching of the Universal Church is the very definition of heresy. As Peter put it “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).

Today, we give thanks to God for inspiring and directing those who wrote the books of the Bible, those who copied and preserved those books (with a special nod to our own Irish monks who did so much to preserve the ancient texts) and for those whose work helps us to discern their proper meaning.

Father Nick Henderson  
Saint Patrick’s Anglican Mission  
Brevard, NC

# Advent 2 - Monday, December 9

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Mark 2:23-3:6

*“Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’”*

(Mark 2:27)

**W**e all know the Pharisees, those who have come down to us as a foil for Jesus—those scrupulous, sticklers for details of the Jewish law, those self-appointed guardians of what it meant to be a faithful, covenant-keeping Jew in first-century, Roman-occupied Israel. The Pharisees appear in the Gospels as those who were hard-heartedly angry at this upstart hanging around with the wrong sorts of people and who is here found plucking grain and healing a man on the Sabbath. For the Pharisees, it can appear as though rules and customs were ends in themselves—as though man were made for the Sabbath—and it tragically blinded many of them to the Messianic presence in their midst.

We have our own versions of that I suppose, our own Pharisees. We have all met them; or perhaps, if we're honest, we ourselves have carried on like them. Getting your doctrine and thinking just right is of great importance in some fundamentalist and Reformed Protestant circles, no matter how lacking in charity or joy such a tradition can be—as though theological precision were an end in itself. And our own Anglo-Catholic Christianity is not immune, especially when it concerns our commitment to liturgical worship. In Pharisee-like fashion, maintaining our beautiful

tradition against the powerful tide of cultural and political change that threatens to envelop the Church can become a badge of faithful—though perhaps angry and joyless—resistance. And in the process it can be easy to forget that the liturgy is the corporate means of worshipping and drawing closer to God. It is not the end.

The liturgy, like the Jewish Sabbath, is in part about freeing God's people, by means of responsive worship, for participation and growth in the divine life. For starters, God is the one who has graciously given us existence, and that alone calls for gratitude. Remember St. Paul's rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 4:17: "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" This includes, most fundamentally, existence. Remind yourself of that often, especially, perhaps, when things are going well; life itself is a good gift from God, and He sustains us during every minute of it. Furthermore, it is God who has graciously redeemed us from sin—freed us and healed us—so that we may worship Him in the first place. And in worshipping as we do, an experience of joyful, Sabbath rest and freedom is before us. When we participate in the Eucharistic liturgy we are taken up anew, refreshed and brought into the restful, divine life of the Holy Trinity, where we receive a mysterious foretaste of the life to come. How easy it is to forget St. Matthew's comfortable words, which we hear during every Mass: "Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." Perhaps it is thus fitting to say, as our Lord said to the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath, the Liturgy was made for man, not man for the Liturgy.

Deacon Grant Brodrecht  
Saint Albans Anglican Cathedral  
Oviedo, FL

## Advent 2 - Tuesday, December 10

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 12:1-12

*“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”*

(Revelation 12:1-2)

**A**t first glance, the woman of Revelation might seem somewhat discordant with what we know from the Christmas story. The figure described here is, indeed, the Blessed Virgin Mary who gave birth to Our Lord Jesus Christ in the city of Bethlehem about two thousand years ago. But the Mary we learn about in scripture and tradition, the daughter of Joachim and Anne, the cousin of Elizabeth, who lived in Nazareth and was betrothed to Joseph, does not appear to be as regal as this description indicates. The virgin mother, after all, was meek and mild, a lowly handmaiden.

But in the story of God’s redemption, things are not always what they seem, at least at first. Like Moses under the reign of Pharaoh, Joseph among his brothers, or Joash under Queen Athaliah, Christ comes under cover as the true prince to defeat the usurper—the devil—and all his works. But usurpers do not typically give up their power without a desperate fight and, in this story, the beast rages against the certain victory of Jesus, leading one last rebellion along with one third of all angels. The Apostle John gives us a vision of what happens next: Michael the Archangel leads the hosts of heaven in a victorious battle against the dragon and his angels.



This is a portrait of the heavenly side of the story of Christ's first coming, a vision of the spiritual reality of history that we know so little about. Our earthly vision sees the Holy Family in all their lowliness without room in the inn. But in the spiritual vision of Revelation, we discover a Messiah who comes to "rule all the nations with a rod of iron," and a woman "clothed with the sun." The radiant symbolism of Revelation reveals Mary to be the Mother of God as well as the New Eve, a personification of the people of God throughout time, and a figure of the Church.

We are told that after the ascension of Christ, the woman takes refuge in the wilderness, where she finds a place "prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished." This is a picture of the earthly pilgrimage of the Church: Like the ancient Israelites in the wilderness, we are fed by the heavenly food of the Eucharist and the word of God. Perhaps in our various circumstances it might seem like the devil has the upper hand. After all, the wilderness is not a particularly comforting place. And we might be tempted to believe that we are not, after all, as protected from danger or as nourished as we would like. But the spiritual vision of John makes clear that Satan and his angels have failed, that spiritual wickedness has ceased to work in the high places, and that Christ's final victory has already been accomplished. This is the spiritual reality that we must pay attention to so that, even in the lowliness of the Christian pilgrimage, we might follow the way of the Blessed Virgin Mary, trusting in the Lord who provides and praying with her: "Be it unto me according to thy word."

Mr. Kyle Williams

Postulant at All Saints Anglican Church

Charlottesville, VA

# Advent 2 - Wednesday, December 11

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Evening Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 12

*“In that day thou shalt say... ‘Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.’*

*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.”*

(Isaiah 12:2-3)

**I**n our reading of the scriptures, it pays dividends to slow down, and let our imaginations get to work. Our imagination is not just something that makes up fantasies. It is the same faculty that allows us to picture something in our so-called “mind’s eye.” Especially in the Old Testament, which is so rich in metaphor and simile, the meaning God wants to show us is often captured best by an image. Rarely do we get a definition. More often God gives us a picture.

For the first part of Isaiah, the prophet must tell his people a disturbing and uncomfortable message, one of sorrow and darkness, fire and pain. Isaiah repeats himself over and again—the future is full of woe for Israel. Take a moment and count the number of times that word appears just in chapter 5.

The ways Isaiah puts it into words are many, but the meaning is consistent: sin brings misery. And Israel has plenty of that in store.

In this context, and at this dismal low point for God’s people, the prophet gives us in chapters 11 and 12 increasingly defined glimpses of hope. While the consequences of Israel’s faithlessness are dire, there is One

coming who will bring an end to misery altogether. His appearing will be like a sudden light flashed into the darkness, and his coming will inspire exalted songs. In contrast to Israel's corrupt rulers, "with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:4). In contrast to the spirit of the age, He will do and keep the commandments of God, because "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him," and he will rule with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

It is here, when Isaiah stops proclaiming woe for a span, he turns to proclaim that God himself will be the salvation of His people, and then imagines the song these blessed people will sing. In chapter 12, Isaiah does what exuberant people often yearn to do: he composes a hymn. And in a brief interlude between his verses, he employs a beautiful image to describe the experience of being saved by God. In contrast to the arid sorrow pictured over and again in the book's beginning, we see a well, and a joyous bucketeer, drawing up that for which he yearns, and which will satisfy his great thirst. Picture it. Imagine someone drawing water up from the well, perhaps pulling the rope, beaming with joy for what they draw. And now, imagine that you hold the rope, and the bucket drawn from the well of salvation is for your drinking.

Sin still brings misery, and there are still consequences for our sins. But Praise be to God, He has promised to quench our thirst, and the moment when we find him to be our salvation will be full of joy. As His first coming was, so His next will be. Shout for joy, all you people!

Mr. Thomas Fickley  
Headmaster of Saint Dunstan's Academy  
Roseland, VA

## Advent 2 - Thursday, December 12

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 14:1-13

*“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.’”*

(Revelation 14:6,7)

**W**hen I was a young boy, my favorite comic book character was Batman, and one of the most potent reasons was that Batman helped me, at about 5 years old, overcome my fear of the dark. Remember, this is 5-year-old logic: in the comics, every other hero wore bright-colored costumes to make it obvious that they were, in fact, the hero. Heroes like Superman and others arrived on scene, in bold colors and symbols on their clothes, to represent goodness, justice and to right the wrongs. Criminals fled from them to avoid getting caught; but they didn't fear them. The hero they DID fear was Batman. The comics often drew Batman as someone that hides in the dark; criminals feared him because they knew merely getting caught was the least of their worries. Frankly, they'd rather have to deal with the police than the dreaded Dark Knight. As a young child, the thought that something might be lurking in the dark that was scarier to the villains than the villains were to me was rather comforting. That dark closet

at the end of the hall might have a monster in it, I reasoned, but it could just as likely be Batman watching over me. To the logic of a 5-year-old, that made total sense.

While growing up may help shed our fear of the dark, there is still, at times, plenty that can make us fearful in the world around us. It can be tempting to fixate on the opposition to Christ's gospel in the world, the persecution wrought upon the Church in different places, or moral norms that our culture has discarded, leaving us wondering what the meek and mild Jesus, in his first coming, could possibly do about it. Visions from the Apostle John (or Isaiah in the First Lesson today), however, serve as a reminder that He watches over us Whom the rest of the world will find far more fearful. Jesus said that our fear should be reserved for the One who is able to destroy the body and the soul (Matt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5). The Lord Jesus Christ, in his first coming, was so gentle that we're sometimes tempted to forget how much he condescended to the human condition to be approachable. The very Jesus that held children in his lap and made breakfast for his disciples after he rose from the dead also "shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end."

In this Advent season it is appropriate to remember how much the Son of God set aside his own "scariness" in the Incarnation so that we might know him; yet only for a time so that we keep a healthy fear of Him whose power the world ought to fear even more. That same powerful God watches over his children with great care, and that should have the effect of diminishing our fear of anything else.

Deacon Aaron Ott  
Saint Albans Anglican Cathedral  
Oviedo, FL

# Advent 2 - Friday, December 13

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## Morning Prayer - Psalm 73

*“So foolish was I, and ignorant, even as it were a beast before thee. Nevertheless, I am always by thee; for thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after that receive me with glory.”*

(Psalm 73:22-4)

**M**ore importantly than Friday the 13th, today is also the feast day of St. Lucy. Born in 283 into a patrician family, Lucy, whose name means “light,” was raised Christian and had decided to consecrate her life to Christ as a celibate and devoted herself to caring for the poor. She was renowned for her beauty, especially her lovely eyes that shined with a glow of inner beauty and goodness. It was said of her that she had a radiance that came from her love for Christ. This was during the height of the Diocletian persecution, and many Christians had taken refuge in the catacombs beneath Syracuse. Lucy carried food and drink to those hiding in the dark, and because her arms were full of food and drink, she lit her way by wearing a wreath on her head into which she had placed candles. Her family had already arranged her marriage, but she gave her dowry to the poor, and as a result her betrothed denounced her to the governor as a Christian.

It was more than her outer beauty; to all she seemed to radiate the light of her faith. The governor threatened her and ordered her to be sent to a brothel, but she was

immovable. The governor tried to have her burned, but the wood refused to ignite. Infuriated, he ordered her eyes gouged out. After all the torture, she still refused, and finally was martyred by a sword through her neck. Along with other martyrs, she is commemorated in the Eucharistic prayer in the Anglican Missal. Saint Lucy's Day is marked in many countries with processions in the darkness led by a young woman wearing a crown bearing candles. Her day is especially honored in the Anglican calendar as the day by which the winter Ember Days are determined: the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following her feast, when the Church prays for those preparing for ordination.

Although today's psalm begins by lamenting the prosperity of the wicked and ungodly, the tone dramatically turns as the psalmist proclaims the steadfast faithfulness of God. When we pray our office today, let us remember the importance of Christian faithfulness, witness, and most of all, courage as we too share the light of Christ.

The Collect of the Day: "Graciously hear us, O God of our salvation: that, like as we do rejoice in the festival of blessed Lucy thy holy Virgin ; so we may learn to follow her in all godly and devout affections. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Father Richard Bugyi-Sutter  
Saint George the Martyr Anglican Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 2 - Saturday, December 14

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 4:30ff

*“Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”*

(Mark 4:30-32)

**A**dvent is a time of prayer and contemplation in anticipation of the birth of Christ and His eventual return for his Bride the Church.

As Anglicans, we believe that prayer and searching the scripture are inseparably linked to one another. If we apply the concept of a grain of mustard seed in our study and prayer, imagine what the Lord will grow out of that investment. The investment that we make during our Advent devotion will pay dividends all through the year.

As we read collects in the Book of Common Prayer as prologue to reading Old and New Testament passages, we are in fact prayerfully reading the Word.

Consider the collect for Advent II from Bishop Cranmer, this is my favorite prayer to use when I teach in any venue:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,



that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a wonderful prayer that can be used every time we broach the word of God. “Lord please open my spiritual eyes, and ears, that I may receive what you have for me at this time of study.” If we simply ask, we will receive what He has for us. The question becomes; what will we do with the insight and understanding that we glean from our study. It is given to us for a purpose. We are not to hide it under a bushel, rather we are to be light to the world in order to do His will and complete our mission of the great commission.

Does the thought of sharing your faith worry you or make you feel inadequate? Do you feel unprepared to step out? Do you think, “Oh what if I make a misstep?” Sharing the Gospel is our job; what the Lord does with the effort is up to Him. It is hard to shine if we hide the Light.

Sharing the Gospel is like learning to play an instrument; it takes practice. We are not virtuosos the first we pick up that instrument. However through practice we become skilled musicians.

My prayer for you as you read these daily devotionals is that the Lord would instill boldness and strengthen you so that the fear of sharing with the lost will be diminished and that you’ll approach the opportunity to share boldly.

Deacon Clyde Wilkins  
Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church  
Warner Robbins, GA

# Advent 3 - Sunday, December 15

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 1:57ff

*“And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.”*

(Luke 1:64)

**T**he silence of Zechariah has been replaced by the silence of the crowd that has gathered for the festivities, as they listen in awe, mouths gaping to the man who has been silent for so long. Most likely no one expected this of the old man. After all, had he not been punished by God? and in the Temple no less! Yes, God had given Zechariah his long prayed for child, but the man who had been counted as righteous before God, one who walked blamelessly in all the Lord’s commandments, had been rendered a deaf mute by the very God he served.

He had countered Gabriel’s message with what was basically a demand for another sign. Why would a man like Zechariah, a priest of the Temple, have answered in the manner he did? Could it be that after years of what seemed like fruitless prayers, he had lost hope? Maybe his prayers had become rote, just something he did, and his faith faltered. Then things just go from bad to worse. And yet, here he is, face radiant, suddenly singing with a voice that grows stronger with each word. What happened during those nine months of forced silence that he is now both prophet and poet?

I can’t say for certain, but based on the hymn that springs from the depths of his soul, this is what I suspect.

He remembered something. He remembered who he is and who his God is, and like King David before him, he cried unto his Lord and “gat himself to his Lord right humbly” (Psalm 30:8). He stopped mourning what he lacked and took stock of what he had. When the noise of his thoughts and disappointments were stilled, he met his God.

St. Theresa of Calcutta was fond of saying, “God is the friend of silence.” Throughout scripture, silence often precedes God’s great actions. In silence, God kept faith with Zechariah and was gracious to him. He steered Zechariah back to the scriptures. He helped him connect the dots between scripture and the message He sent by Gabriel.

It will be his child that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah as the voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). It will be his son that will herald the “Sun of righteousness,” spoken of by Malachi (Malachi 4:2), the “dayspring from on high” that Zechariah so elegantly declares has come. Zechariah realizes, through God’s gift of silence, that the time long awaited is here. How can his heart and voice not soar? There was no punishment, only gift. And through Zechariah, God has given us a gift uniquely suited for *Gaudete* Sunday, this Sunday of Joy in Advent, that we too might sing with all believers of the joy of our salvation, of the “dayspring from on high who visited us” and who will come again.

Deaconess Clare Burgess  
Saint Paul’s Anglican Church and School  
Melbourne, FL

# Advent 3 - Monday, December 16

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 5:1-20

*“They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.”*

(Mark 5:1-2)

**W**hen we read this story of a demon possessed man, we may experience many different emotions. We may feel pity for this man, or perhaps justified if we assume that he is demon possessed for a transgression. When I read this story, I see a man that has lost hope, only to gain it again through Jesus. Hope is the oxygen our souls need to thrive. Hope is the very thing that will cause us to stand again and again after being knocked down. Hope is the essence of being a follower of Christ. In Scripture hope is defined as a “confident expectation.” As Christians our hope is rooted in our faith in the divine salvation in Christ (Galatians 5:5) and through the love poured into us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). St. Paul writes, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5, NKJV). In the context, Paul explains that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1); because of that, we stand in His grace and we rejoice, looking forward to the unveiling of His glory (Romans 5:2). As we look forward in hope and anticipation, we can even rejoice in our tribulations (Romans 5:3a). We don’t take joy in the tribulations themselves; rather, we rejoice in what they accomplish in our lives. St. Paul lays out the progression of results from the difficulties we encounter: “Knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance” (Romans 5:3b, NASB). Encountering hardship strengthens us and can enable us to withstand even more.

It is easy to have hope when we can see an answer to our predicament, an answer that provides us with a solution. In such

a case, having hope is easy because I can visualize the answer to my problem. But what happens when I cannot see an answer? I would venture to guess that someone who is reading this article right now is facing at least one situation that looks hopeless, where there just does not appear to be an answer to their situation. But there is good news. There is hope. As believers in Jesus we always have hope. With God we always have hope. Even if we cannot see a way out of a situation, God can.

It is important for us to remember that even our Lord experienced disappointment during his earthly ministry. When the people didn't receive His message, when His disciples struggled with doubt, or when He encountered legalistic religious leaders who wanted to kill Him, our Lord expressed disappointment. Scripture is rich with the accounts of real-life people that overcame disappointment and went on to accomplish great things for God. The one thing that each of these people had in common was their hope in God. Their belief in God was bigger than their disappointment. Hope in God transcends the lost hopes of human frailty and sin, and often hope in God begins to take effect in our lives precisely when human hopes are gone.

When our hope is in God, through His Son our Lord we know that all things are possible. This does not mean that as Christians we will not experience disappointment or find ourselves in situations where things may seem hopeless. But if we hold strong in our faith and be patient, knowing that God does not work on our time table but His, then God will be faithful to us. So, during this Advent season as we prepare ourselves in hope of the return of our Lord, let us be reassured that God hears our prayers and knows our needs. God will not abandon us during our time of need and because of that we have hope that tomorrow will be better, and we have the promise of our Lord that He will return for us, and it is in this that we have hope.

Father Yossi Sarid  
Saint Peter the Apostle Anglican Church  
Kingsport, TN

## Advent 3 - Tuesday, December 17

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 5:21ff

*“And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet.”*  
(Mark 5:22)

**I**n this last portion of St. Mark's Gospel, we are presented with an interruption of the action by a woman afflicted with a hemorrhage. As in chapter 11, where a fig tree is cursed and the cleansing of the Temple takes place, so here the arrangement of the narrative offers some additional insights into the text.

The Pharisees have already wished to dispatch Jesus on account of His violating the Sabbath (and as a consequence of their being continually “put into place” by His teaching and example). It is somewhat surprising, then, that a leader of this synagogue would be willing to approach Him and, by doing so, jeopardising his own position. Yet, who wouldn't go to the ends of the earth on behalf of their own children?

In seeking Jesus, he must have already a modicum of faith that here is the “real thing.” Such saving faith is presented throughout the Gospels as the prerequisite for healing to take place. Here we have not only the official's faith, but also the added demonstration mixed in of the woman desperate to be cured of her own affliction and yet who is at the same time filled with great confidence in her intuition of Jesus' ability to help her.

And thus what is being shown is an argument from degree, moving from a difficult (the daughter is not yet dead) to an impossible (twelve years and all of her

resources spent with no improvement) to an insurmountable healing (the little girl is reported to have died before Jesus arrives). If the one instance is do-able, then it stands to reason that something even greater might just be possible.

Surely Jesus already knew both that someone had been healed and exactly who it was that had touched him. As in John 11, at the raising of His friend Lazarus, we read: “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (vs. 41-42).

Also, He is not content that she has been healed, but wishes to speak with her as well. Perhaps not only to confirm her cure, but also to emphasise that she is now a disciple too, that her life has been forever altered by means of this new and lasting relationship. She is now included in that great and privileged company of Jesus' brothers and sisters, those who do the will of God and believe in His Son (cf. Mark 3:35).

There is one more thing to note. The same three Apostles, later chosen to witness the glory of the Transfiguration, are here singled out to witness the dead brought back to life; again working from the lesser to the greater thing. If Jesus can raise this child back to life, surely He Himself can rise again as well.

Father Dan Squires  
Saint Paul's Anglican Church and School  
Melbourne, FL

# Advent 3 - Ember Wednesday, December 18

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 12:35-48

*“Blessed is that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.”*

(Luke 12:43-44)

**I**n the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Luke, Jesus is speaking to an innumerable multitude of people” (12:1). His words are at once both brimming with comfort and sharply severe. In this passage he inspires courage saying “be not afraid of them that kill the body” but with the same breath utters the chilling rejoinder “fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast you into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him” (12:4-5). He assures those who hear his words, “Fear not little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (12:32) but moments later he describes the destiny of the man who is slothful and who imagines that his lord will not return for a long time yet, “The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers” (12:46).

In the midst of these sayings addressed to an innumerable multitude of people, Saint Luke records a question asked by Saint Peter who queries, “Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?” Jesus simply proceeds unfazed, continuing the theme of being prepared for the return of the master, but, signifying that he has heard St. Peter, He now



turns the focus of his words towards those who are to be leaders in the kingdom of God.

To Saint Peter, one whom Jesus would later famously instruct to “feed my sheep,” He responds, rhetorically asking “Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?” I like to think that Jesus left a pause here, looking at his questioner and allowing Saint Peter’s mental wheels to start turning. Indeed, Saint Peter may have thought, “Who is the faithful and wise steward?” As a student who could not be sure that his teacher wanted an answer to the question of if he was meant to remain silent, I imagine Saint Peter perhaps almost venturing a sheepish response of “Do you mean me?”

Now we are getting down to it. Not long after this time, when Jesus reveals that there will be a betrayer amongst the disciples, the question racing through the disciples minds was, “Is it I? Do you mean me?” Here, in this more public address, the same reflexive reply is elicited from an opposite question, and it is the question that drives all motivation for the penitential obedience of Advent. “Who is faithful and wise?” When the Lord returns, will you be the one who has foolishly reasoned that his coming is a long time off and that repentance and acquiescence can be delayed for another time? Will you be “assigned a place with the unbelievers?” Or will you be the one of those who hear His word and asks “Do you mean me?” Will you be one who, hearing the answer “Yes, you,” obeys without delay? Let us strive to be ones about whom Christ can say, “Blessed is that servant whose master finds him so doing when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions” (12:43-44).

Father Paul Rivard

Saint George the Martyr Anglican Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 3 - Thursday, December 19

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Morning Prayer - Psalm 96

*“O Sing unto the Lord a new song: Sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth....For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth, and with righteousness to judge the world, and the peoples with his truth.”*

(Psalm 96:1,13)

**D**uring Advent we tend to mainly focus on the coming of our Lord and Savior as a babe in the manger. But it is also the time when we should be preparing ourselves for the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior.

“For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth, and with righteousness to judge the world, and the peoples with his truth.”

He's coming to judge “the earth,” “the world,” “and the peoples”: that means us. We will be judged “with his truth.” Jesus is that truth. How will we stack up against this truth? Will we have a clean conscience or will we try to hide an unclean one?

Taking advantage of the Sacrament of Penance during the season of Advent is the best way to clean our conscience. “What?! Go to Confession?! You mean to actually confess my sins out loud to a priest?!” Yes. To actually hear ourselves listing our sins is to really and truly acknowledge them. To get them off our chest and give them to our Lord is the only way.

“But to a priest?! What will he think of me when he hears all the bad things I have done?” We must remember that the priest is “in persona Christi”—in the person of Christ. All he does in his dealings with us is in the Person of Christ. So what will he “think” about our sins? He will think what Christ thinks: “your sins are forgiven.” We are forgiven by Christ through the priest so that we can actually hear the absolution and be certain of it.

Going to confession doesn't hurt, or if it does it's the “good” kind of hurt that wakes us up and gets us to come closer to our Lord and Savior. By faithfully doing the penance assigned to us by Christ, through the priest, we can go back out into the world with a sigh of relief; not only that that “ordeal” is over but, because we know the truth and are truly forgiven.

“O Sing unto the Lord a new song.” This new song that we sing is that we are loved by the Almighty; and because we are loved, we are forgiven. One of the favorite hymns of the Advent season is “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”; now we can sing it and mean it. We want him to come so that we can “sing unto the Lord, [with] the whole earth.” We need not be afraid that “he cometh to judge the earth,” “the world,” “and the peoples” because as Christians we are loved and therefore forgiven.

May this advent season be truth-filled for you.

Sister Linda Burns  
Saint Albans Anglican Cathedral  
Oviedo, FL

## Advent 3 - Ember Friday, December 20

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - 2 Corinthians 5:5-21

*“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent,  
we may be accepted of him.”*

(1 Cor. 5:9)

**A**dvent is all about preparing to welcome Christ’s coming to us at Christmas, inwardly and spiritually. At Christmas we shall celebrate the historical fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. But history is gone, and Christians are called to find the spiritual significance of Christ’s Incarnation for them in the here and now. One author reminds us that God always intended to Incarnate, which is to say that He always meant for His Word to be made flesh in the hearts of the faithful.

Our Scripture verse helps us to understand this better. We do well to remember that St. Paul, Christ’s greatest interpreter, takes what he knows of Christ’s all saving life and translates it into the spiritual truth of Christ the Word. He never mentions Christ’s miracles, and he translates the truth of His parables into theology for every man. While he explains the meaning of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, he doesn’t even say very much about Christ’s birth. Rather, his self-conscious calling directs him to explain the meaning of the Incarnation in spiritual terms of death and the new birth of Christ the Word in the soul. What concerns Paul most is the conversion that demands dying to the old man and coming alive to the new. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me (Gal. 2: 20).

Today's Scripture reading refers us to death and new life in our souls. St. Paul has been speaking to his hearers about the conflict between being worldly or heavenly, fleshly or spiritual, being clothed from above or being clothed from below. The contrast reveals a struggle common to every Christian. The Christian is torn between being at home in the body or at home with God. And St. Paul does not mean to disparage the body or the flesh. Rather, he would have us see how the newborn life of the soul at home with God, ruled and governed by Christ the Word, conditions and disciplines the body.

Of course, to become more at home with God, we need prayer. If we are called to be absent from God and at home in the body because of the duties and obligations of the external life of home, church, and city, we must remember that our faith would rather have us at home with God, through Christ the indwelling Word.

To be at home with God comes only by way of practice and habit. Aristotle says that we become good by doing good things. The good thing that we must do in our lives is pray. Prayer calls us away from the world, the flesh, and the devil to be at home with God. Prayer opens our hearts to Christ the Word, renders us accountable to God spiritually through Him, and opens our souls to the healing and transformation that He alone can give. If we intend to reach God and Heaven, through prayer we might consider becoming less at home in the body, so that the Christ of history becomes the newborn Word made flesh in us, for our salvation.

Father William Martin  
Saint Michael and All Angels Anglican Church  
Arden, NC

# Advent 3 - St. Thomas the Apostle, December 21

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - John 14:1-14

*“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*

*(John 14:5,6)*

**S**t. Thomas the Apostle, often remembered as “doubting Thomas,” offers us a beautiful lesson about faith, especially when we look at his role in John 14:5-6. When Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to prepare a place for them, St. Thomas asks an honest question: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). In response, Jesus reveals a profound truth: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Here, we see that St. Thomas’s doubt becomes an opportunity for Jesus to reveal His unique relationship with the Father and His role as the path to eternal life.

St. Thomas’s question, born of confusion and uncertainty, is deeply human. Many of us can relate to his doubt, especially when we are faced with life’s trials, losses, and mysteries. Doubt is not foreign to the life of faith; rather, it is part of the journey. Thomas’s honest inquiry reveals that faith does not always mean a complete absence of doubt but a willingness to bring those doubts to Jesus, who can transform them. Jesus does not rebuke St. Thomas for his

lack of understanding; instead, He answers him gently, reminding Thomas—and all of us—that in knowing and following Him, we know the Father.

Christ's words are profoundly comforting. By identifying Himself as “the way,” He offers us assurance in times of uncertainty. Jesus does not simply point us in the right direction; He is the very path to God. As “the truth,” He reveals the nature of God—His love, His mercy, His justice. And as “the life,” Jesus shares divine life with us, strengthening us in our weakness and healing us in our brokenness. When we grapple with doubt, Jesus' presence reminds us that we are not alone; we walk with the One who embodies God's love and who is the fulfillment of all we seek.

Following Christ, however, is more than an intellectual assent; it requires an act of the will. Like Thomas, we are invited to step forward even when we do not fully understand. Faith, in its deepest sense, is an act of trust and surrender. To follow Jesus is to hold fast to Him and rely on His grace, even when doubts arise. The journey of faith calls us to cling to Jesus, especially when we don't feel strong enough on our own. In times of doubt, we can lean on the grace of the sacraments, the Word of God, and the community of believers, all of which support and sustain us.

St. Thomas's story reminds us that doubt is not a barrier to faith but an invitation to deepen it. When we follow Christ in faith and trust, even in the midst of uncertainty, we discover a profound peace. For Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, meets us in our doubts and leads us toward a love that never fails.

Father Creighton McElveen  
Saint Hilda's Anglican Church, ACC  
Atlanta, GA

# Advent 4 - Sunday, December 22

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 3:1-17

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

(Luke 3:4b-6)

Several centuries before the incarnation of our Lord, the prophet Isaiah issued a clarion call from “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” The imperative demand of the prophecy was the following, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

I suppose that a person could claim ignorance about what this might mean, complaining that a distant middle eastern wilderness becomes impossibly abstract when used as a metaphor for the arrival of a royal figure. Furthermore, in this country we elect our government and where there are royal figures anymore they are largely ornamental to the broader culture. So, there it is, we don't know what is meant by preparing the way of the Lord and making his path straight - except that we do. We know very well what this means.

When we hear the next words of Isaiah used by St. Luke in reference to the birth of Christ, we may again pretend not to understand. “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low” describes a surreal environment that anyone, except perhaps those who were



raised in the plains of the mid-west, would say belonged in a hallucinogenic vision.

Having been raised in the plains of Saskatchewan, I can testify to the effect that a landscape of no mountains and no valleys produces. First, once a person is outside of the city limits and there are no buildings left to block the view, the horizon is the actual horizon. When valleys are filled and when mountains are brought low, all things are visible as far as the eye can see and it is only the curvature of the earth that prevents one from seeing even farther. Secondly, a landscape like this will have roads and highways that are perfectly, and I mean perfectly, straight.

When the prophet Isaiah's words are repeated in the third chapter of the gospel according to Saint Luke, we can pretend to be confused, but we know what it means. It means that the Lord, "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," is giving us a chance to prepare and to ready ourselves for what is about to happen. All things are about to be seen and known. Jesus, who would later speak of a day where "nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known" (Luke 12:3), is giving us a chance right now to repent and to believe. He is giving us a chance to stop pretending that we don't understand. Our Lord is coming to us in a straightforward manner such that there will be nowhere to hide. May we be amongst those who welcome this day and who rejoice to learn that "All flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Father Paul Rivard  
Saint George the Martyr Anglican Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 4 - Monday, December 23

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Morning Prayer - Psalm 116

*“For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes  
from tears, and my feet from falling.”*

(Psalm 116:8)

**D**uring my time in the Marine Corps, we were given mission directives, which was an order about what we were going to do. These directives were given in the broadest terms and then given to the troops on the ground to execute the directive. The Psalmist in this morning’s psalm gives us God’s mission directive of the Incarnation.

Why did the Son of God willingly take on human flesh? Well, we are given the answer in this morning’s psalm of thanksgiving. He came to deliver our souls from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from stumbling.

Beginning with the Incarnation and continuing with the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the primary mission of our God was to redeem all of humanity; that is, to deliver our souls from death, death being that great enemy that no one can overcome, this insurmountable obstacle between humans and God. To save us from separation from God, our Lord came down to earth to become one of us so that He could take on death and conquer it for us. Without Jesus Christ, we would all be dead in our sins.

Not only does our Lord bring salvation to our souls at the end of our lives, He also impacts our lives here on earth. Salvation in the future is not the only gift we receive as Christians; we are also given comfort here on earth. Our Lord is with us even in the moments when we are brought to tears, especially in those moments. He knows what it is like to suffer; He invites us to give to Him all that brings us to tears.

Finally, He directs our feet so that we do not stumble. The mission of the Christian, after they have received Christ into their life, is to walk in the way of our Lord. To follow in His footsteps. To avoid the holes and rocks of sinning and to choose the cultivated pathways of the grace of God. We come to know that His path is the right path and will save us from so much struggling and self-inflicted harm. We have in the Word of God the correct way to navigate this life so that we do not stumble.

While the mission directive in Psalm 116 is in the broadest terms, our Lord took this directive and executed it on the ground perfectly. He dropped behind enemy lines and began His life-saving mission. In the cover of darkness was the savior of the world born, ready to take the fight to the enemy. May we also be thankful with the Psalmist in what God has done for us. Amen.

Father Scott Greene  
Holy Cross Anglican Church  
Farragut, TN

# Christmas Eve

## Tuesday, December 24

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Evening Prayer - 2nd Lesson - Zechariah 2:10ff

*“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee.”*

(Zechariah 2:10-11)

**T**he texts assigned for Christmas Eve anticipate the great work of the Christmas Day. All of history finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation of God. This mighty work began at the Annunciation when the Word was made flesh of the Virgin Mary. This work remains hidden in the womb of Our Lady, known only to her and a few others, such as St. Elizabeth her kinswoman and St. Joseph, her betrothed.

Now that the Nativity of Our Lord is upon us, the Incarnation of God will be made known to the world. This is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan for Humanity. The Creator is Emmanuel, “God with us.” Furthermore, God is one of us; in taking on Human Nature He is in solidarity with His creature. God’s plan for Humanity was always union with Himself, and that is accomplished in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul puts it in his Epistle to the Galatians, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem

them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

The Incarnation of God is His work, but he graciously asks us to participate in it. Mary is asked to be the Mother of God, to bear God’s Son for the salvation of the whole world. Mary is prefigured in the passage from Zechariah 2, where it is written “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people.”

In the song of Zacharias from Morning Prayer, St. John the Baptist is proclaimed to be “the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.” In Matthew 1 from the Second Lesson of Evening Prayer, St. Joseph is asked to lay aside his own life and ambitions for the sake of his betrothed, the Virgin Mary, and for her Son who “shall save his people from their sins.” In each case, these people, Mary, John, and Joseph were asked to participate in God’s work, and to put their own desires and goals aside so that God’s will could be accomplished through them.

This Christmas, let us lay aside our own ambition and pride, and humble ourselves so that we might be God’s instruments, to accomplish His will. In so doing we are given the great honor of being made “labourers together with God.”

Father Joshua Kimbril  
Saint Matthew’s Anglican Church  
Weaverville, NC

# Christmas Day

## Wednesday, December 25

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*O that birth forever blessed, when a Virgin, full of grace, by  
the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Saviour of our race; and  
the Babe, the world's Redeemer, first revealed His sacred face,  
evermore and evermore!*

**O**ver a millennium ago, in the expansive Church of Blachernae in Constantinople, elevated upon the ceiling nearest the Altar, emanated a vast icon of a Jewish teenaged girl, that same young maiden who is such a central figure in the Christmas solemnity.

On the wall there, she stood above us *orans*, her hands raised in a posture of prayer, and directly in front of her, in a halo or nimbus, an icon of her Divine Son, His hand lifted towards us in blessing. That image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is called *Platytera tou kosmou*, the Woman Broader than the Universe. Mary was great with Child (Saint Luke 2.5); her Child is Almighty God. She contained the One whom the heaven of heavens is too minute and constricted to hold.

The petite womb of Mary enthroned within the Creator of the Universe, the God who is beyond measure greater than all the galaxies that float across the night sky. The body of a girl was wider than creation.

Then one December dusk, in the cool evening air, sounded the cry of the new-born baby boy. The whimper came from a cave that served as both a feeding trough and a nursery. The cave in Bethlehem, as C. S. Lewis powerfully

describes it in *The Last Battle*, 'had something in it that was bigger than our entire world.' The stable, like Mary, was great with child; very great indeed, for that Child is God.

And what is true of the immaculate womb of the All-Holy Mother of God, and what is true of the cave in Bethlehem, is also the undeniable truth of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Bread becomes God - *panis factus Deus*. Humbly I adore thee, Deity Unseen, whose true Presence hidest 'neath these shadows mean. *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, quae sub his figuris vere latitas*.

Delicate small hosts of unleavened bread are refashioned by the Creator of the world to become Himself. As Mary's Baby Boy was larger than all creation, than all the solar systems and nebulae and breadth and depth of it, so the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist is larger than the cosmic span.

On Christmas Day, the most astonishing Christmas present ever exchanged is brought to our memory. Our Lady gives back to God His own gift of grace to her, by giving to God a perfect and sinless human nature to unite inseparably and hypostatically with His divine nature, for us men and for our salvation. On Christmas, Mary is our mother, as well as the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Because if we are one with Christ, one in Christ, as Saint Paul instructs, then Christ's Mother is our Mother as well.

When we kneel at the Altar and receive the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Eternal Logos made Flesh, true God and true Man, Our Lord's Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity under the form of bread and wine, what the priest gingerly places in our mouths is nothing less than the same identical Body that Christ assumed from Mary and the same

identical Blood which circulated in her body before it circulated in His. Our Lady is our Mother; and what do mothers do? Mamas feed their babies.

The Mother, Holy Mary, provides food for her children in this our exile, food carefully prepared for viaticum, way-bread for the journey, as we sojourn through this valley of tears; food to strengthen us until we arrive in our true native land with God. Bethlehem is Hebrew for 'house of bread.' And as we approach the Altar in the Holy Mass, to make our Christmas Communion, the Mother of this Bread-House, the *Theotokos*, the God-Bearer, carries from her pantry and gifts to us the living Bread which comes down from heaven, the Bread given for the life of the world, the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.

As we receive the Word made Flesh in our Christmas Communion, let us remember that the majestic and eternal Love Himself, Love incomprehensible, comes to make His dwelling place in our weak and sinful bodies; so that, as we ride home for our family Christmastide, we will be *Theotokoi*, God-bearers, *platyteroi tou kosmou*, those broader than the universe.

Please be assured of my love and prayers for each and every one of you and your families. A joyous and happy Christmas to you all - God bless you!

The Most Reverend Chandler Holder Jones  
Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Province of America  
Bishop Ordinary, Diocese of the Eastern United States



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