



Welcome to the Jesuit School of Theology's online daily prayer series for Advent: Waiting in Joyful Hope.

In the days to follow, you will receive an email with a link to the Scripture readings of the day and a reflection on those readings. The reflections are written by the students, faculty, staff, board members, and alumni of the Jesuit School of Theology, one of Santa Clara's six schools, as well as faculty and staff of Santa Clara University. Our hope is that these beautiful reflections will deepen your experience of Advent and Christmas during this special time in the Church year.

Consider these daily emails an invitation to a retreat experience. Find some quiet in your day to review the readings and the accompanying reflection. Let the reflection inspire your own praying and thinking. Ultimately, our goal is to know Jesus Christ more deeply, so that we can love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

At JST, we are always attentive to the larger context in which we are learning and living. If the Spirit moves you, bring to your praying what you experience in the very ordinary routines of daily life and what you read in the news. Moreover, as the Church confronts again the painful reality of sexual abuse and abuse of authority, allow your own interior responses and ideas to emerge naturally in light of the readings of the day. What is God trying to teach us at this moment?

This journey is not a singular experience. First of all, the Lord walks with each of us, relating to us uniquely and offering divine friendship. Moreover, we make this retreat together, thousands of people in the wider Santa Clara community united virtually with a common desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. You might wish to reach out to a friend to share your experiences through the weeks. Or you might journal about what you are experiencing and learning.

St. Ignatius of Loyola insisted that the most important spiritual disposition as we begin a retreat is generosity, a largeness of heart that is open to God's creativity and activity in our lives. Signing up for this online retreat underscores the generosity of spirit and time that you now offer.

Godspeed on the adventure ahead!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kevin O'Brien S.J.'.

Kevin O'Brien, S.J.  
Dean, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

[JER 33:14-16; PS 25: 4-5, 8-9, 10, 14; 1 THES 3:12-4:2; LK 21: 25-28, 34-36](#)

On December 2, 1980 four American churchwomen were martyred in El Salvador. Jean Donovan, a Maryknoll lay missionary, was one of these four women, and the house patron of the Jean Donovan Lay Intentional Community at JST, which I have lived in for the past year and half. To begin Advent on the anniversary of their deaths offers all of us a concrete example of what it means to wait in joyful hope. The joy that we are called to in this liturgical season, and always as Christians, is not a cheap joy that ignores the pain and suffering of this world, but a joy rooted in the hope of the Kingdom. Through the example of these four churchwomen, we see the embodiment of the last sentence of today's Gospel: "Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

The hope we are called to is the hope that asks us to increase and abound in love for one another and for all. This is the hope that allows us to be guided by justice. This is the hope that we will have the strength to stand before the Son of Man, even when this means laying down one's life.

So let us lift our souls to the Lord. Let us strive to keep the covenant. Let us be vigilant at all times, seeking ways for our love to grow. Let us wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior and the Kingdom.



*God of justice, through the lives of the martyrs, inspire us as us we strive to bring about your reign here and now.*

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Lizzy Fahey, M.Div. '20

December 3

Memorial of St. Francis Xavier

[IS 2:1-5; PS 122: 1-2, 3-4B, 4CD-5, 6-7, 8-9; MT 8:5-11](#)

When God became incarnate in Christ Jesus, every part of our humanity was hallowed, including our human emotions and dispositions. The Gospel gives us glimpses at various points into the emotional life of Jesus. We see him sad for his friend Lazarus, angry at the corruption in the Temple, frustrated with followers, anxious at Gethsemane. In John Jesus speaks of his joy, and in today's encounter with the Roman centurion, Jesus is amazed.

The amazed Jesus provides an alternative to cynicism and jadedness that mark our present age.

When was the last time you allowed yourself to be amazed?

I was recently with a group of anthropologists discussing wonder and amazement. One of them spoke of observing visitors at the Omora Ethnobotanical Park on Tierra de Fuego, the windswept archipelago at the bottom of South America. What interested her most was watching children with magnifying glasses look at the "tiniest forest in the world," made of lichen, fungi, and mosses. They "oohed" and "aahed" as they beheld the flora that in other instances they'd walk on.

Advent provides an opportunity to take the time to be amazed, to "wonder as we wander," to be awestruck at how the love of God is always and already available to us.



*Almighty God, I realize the triumph of your Light. Shine it in my life so that I might see and be amazed at your Love present to me.*

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Martin Connell, S.J., M.Div. '93  
Rector, Jesuit Community of Berkeley

December 4

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

[IS 11:1-10; PS 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Lk 10:21-24](#)

Every Advent of my childhood, my Mom and I scoured the neighborhood for a really good branch. Only a certain fallen tree limb met the requirements for the Jesse Tree. We carefully set the branch in place to preserve the reverence of the ceremony... also to make sure it wouldn't fall down. Each week of the Advent season, the whole elementary school gathered around the Jesse Tree. We retold a biblical story, and a select student got to hang an ornament symbolic of that story on the tree. I sat crisscross-applesauce and marveled as the dead tree branch transformed into a gloriously adorned wonder of the Advent season.

That is the spirit of today's readings: wonder and awe. We gaze upon all that blossomed from our tradition like a child starting up at the Jesse Tree. We look to the coming of our Savior with joyful hope. Truly, this is cause for celebration! Today we are called to rejoice because our savior will be born. Dance! Run! Play! We offer praise and thanks to an Almighty God. We sing for the days to come: when justice and peace will abound. Today let us honor our childlike spirit. Let God bless us with the Graces of wonder and awe so that we may see and hear God's majesty. And when God reveals Herself to us, let us not hesitate to rejoice as Jesus did. Overflowing with Grace, we will tell our tales, just as we retell those hanging upon our Jesse Trees each year.



*God, give me eyes that see  
Ears that hear  
And a voice that sings of your glory  
This Advent, give me the faith of a child  
Excitedly waiting  
In faithful expectation  
And joyful hope  
For the birth of Christ Jesus  
Amen*

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Maddie LaForge, M.Div. '21

December 5

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

[IS 25:6-10A; PS 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6; MT 15:29-37](#)

I write this reflection full of sorrow and at the same time full of hope. I am hope-filled because I am with the Missionaries of Charity, also known as the Mother Teresa Sisters, for a retreat. They embody what Jesus does in today's Gospel. They tend to the less fortunate of the Huruma (Swahili for Mercy) Slum in Nairobi, Kenya. They take part in the healing ministry that Jesus calls each of us to participate in. As it is written in today's Gospel, "the lame, the maimed, the blind, and many others," these people keep streaming into the Mother Teresa Compound each day where they are received with open arms. These Sisters are literally doing what Jesus did. How do I receive such people in my life? That's what I keep asking myself as I watch the goings-on around the compound. I think the Sisters and Jesus in today's Gospel challenge us to be more radical in reaching out to the less fortunate, to get out of our comfort zones and to be in the frontiers such as Huruma's Charity Street where the Mother Teresa Sisters quietly do their work.

I am in deep sorrow because my companion and friend Jesuit Father Victor-Luke Odhiambo, S.J., has been martyred in Cueibet, South Sudan. I had the privilege to live with Victor-Luke for one year. His dedication to the local people embodied the mercy Jesus showed to the crowd in today's Gospel. He gave his life totally in service of the people of Wau and Cueibet, South Sudan, with joy and humor. He was fondly known as the "foot soldier of Christ."

I believe the witness of the Sisters at Charity Street and the life of Father Victor-Luke challenge us to be more radical in our following of Christ and proclaiming the Reign of God here on earth. This Advent, as we prepare for the birth of Jesus, may the lives of Martyr Victor-Luke and the Sisters at Charity Street, Huruma be an inspiration for us as we journey towards Christmas. May we bring mercy (huruma), love, and hope to all we meet, especially to the less fortunate - even if this may lead us to areas we would rather not go.



*Let us pray that we may follow Christ in reaching out to the poor and that we may be living examples of bringing healing and love into this broken world.*

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Oscar Momanyi, S.J., M.Div. '17, S.T.L. '18

December 6

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

[IS 26:1-6; PS 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27A; MT 7:21, 24-27](#)

*"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."*

Both the Isaiah passage and Gospel reading for today depict God and Christian faith as a rock. As a child, I was taught that Matthew's Gospel was a simple recipe: profess belief in God, and God will always support you. While there might be truth to this, more lies beneath the surface. Isaiah's words highlight God's deep commitment to social justice ideals. Isaiah speaks of "keeping the faith" but follows this by making it abundantly clear that keeping the faith is never a passive acceptance of the status quo. It is not enough to simply identify as Christian; our actions must actively support the poor and persecuted.

Rock is a strong substance, but precisely because of this strength, when rock moves it shakes the whole world. As we know well in the Bay Area, earthquakes have the power to demolish towering buildings in a matter of minutes. Isaiah's God-as-rock abolishes injustices as thoroughly as earthquakes overturn edifices. Similarly, God calls us to shake up the world in dynamic ways. Where do we see inequality that needs to be rattled? How can we help God "open up the gates to let in a nation that is just"? Labeling ourselves as Christians is not enough. Instead, particularly in today's world, God wants us to fight for the rights of the oppressed.



*God, the world today falls short of your vision for a just society. Give us the courage to challenge oppression and create structural change. Grant us the strength to open your gates of justice.*

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Brianna Deutsch, M.A. '20

December 7

Memorial of St. Ambrose

[IS 29:17-24; PS 17:1, 4, 13-14; MT 9:27-31](#)

In Advent, we have the luxury of knowing exactly how long we will be waiting. We can take quite literally the “little while” the prophet Isaiah tells us about as we await the joy of Jesus’ birth. Yet, the state of the world and that of our lives are often very different. We see and experience much more gloom and darkness than light and salvation. The wait for justice and equality can seem beyond what is reasonable or even fair. If you are like me, you may have even said to God a few times, “What exactly are you waiting for? How long exactly is a ‘little while’?” Yet, we are told the Lord is in our midst. Where, then, is God?

When Jesus heals the blind in today's Gospel, he sternly tells them not to tell anyone. Thank God they did not listen. Otherwise, we would never know of Jesus’ ability to open eyes.

Is it possible that seeds of justice, equality, and mercy are growing into forests all around us, but, for whatever reason, we cannot see them? Is it possible that God celebrates the meek and humble each and every day, but we are too busy waiting for arrogant tyrants to be overthrown? Is it possible that God does not wish to leave us blind, but continually offers us consoling understanding and wisdom?

In Advent, our hope is not blind nor our wait uninformed. We wait upon a God whom we know will deliver justice and peace. We know this because we see subtle signs of the Kingdom all around us in the passion and compassion of our friends, colleagues, and families. Even though our world still awaits the fullness of the justice it so desperately needs, we patiently wait with eyes wide open.



*Lord Jesus, as we await you in this Advent season, open our eyes to see the subtle signs of your Kingdom already present in our world. Wherever we do not see those signs, give us patience, but also give us wisdom to know when to sow the seeds of justice and peace.*

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J.T. Tanner, S.J., M.Div. '19

December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

[GN 3:9-15, 20; PS 98:1, 2-3AB, 3CD-4; EPH 1:3-6, 11-12; LK 1:26-38](#)

Today, as we celebrate the Immaculate Conception and read in Luke's Gospel of Gabriel's visit to Mary, we are invited to understand Mary anew. An awful lot of imagery and theology is heaped upon a teenage girl from the small village of Nazareth—Perpetual Virginity, Assumption, Queen of Heaven, Immaculate Conception. Sometimes I wonder if Mary recognizes herself in all of this theology. What might it look like if we imagine Mary in new ways?

What if we decide to break the mold of usual representations of Mary and accept the call in Psalm (98) to "sing a new song"? For example, what kind of woman raises a courageously disruptive man like Jesus? What kind of woman guides Jesus in growing into an understanding of the connection between his relationship with God in prayer and God's love of the most vulnerable? What kind of woman teaches her child to know that God's agenda is about the reversal of expectations in our world? (Luke 1:46-55) What if we switch the messages usually assigned to each gender in relation to Mary and Jesus? What if we preach gentleness and obedience for men and creative, courageous disruption for women? What new possibilities exist for us as we pray to this courageous mother, this wise woman?



*Mary, dear Mary,  
Your knowledge of the heart of God  
is a blessing for you and for all women and men.  
The fruits of that blessing continue to nurture us all through Jesus.  
Holy Mary, mother who guided God  
Pray for us now.  
Keep us from the sin that stifles the gifts of others.  
Lead us away from all that brings death  
to ourselves and our sisters and brothers.*

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Sarah Kohles, O.F.M., Ph.D. student of Biblical Studies



December 9

Second Sunday of Advent

[BAR 5:1-9; PS 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; PHIL 1:4-6, 8-11; LK 3:1-6](#)

HOPE and JOY were nearly inconceivable, if not impossible, during those days in Israel.

During the time of Baruch (~ 587 B.C.), Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. The Chaldean army burned down the Temple as well as the royal palace and houses of important people in Jerusalem. They destroyed the city walls (Jer 52: 13). People of Jerusalem were deported to Babylonia. Only the poorest people were left in the city. The people of Judah – kings, rulers, priests, prophets, ancestors were filled with shame (Bar 1:15).

It was not any better in the time of John the Baptist, as Luke recalled. Palestine was occupied by the Romans. Venality, hostility, violence, and endless savage ferocity characterized the attitude of the Roman administration towards the Jews. Hearing names such as Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and Herod would make the Jews cringe.

Paul was writing to the Philippians while being kept “in chains” in a Roman prison (1:17). Enough said.

Communicating from such a bleak condition, the message of hope and joy as we heard in the readings today must have been astonishing. To the people of Jerusalem, Baruch summoned, “take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God” (5:1). To the Philippians, Paul wrote, “I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you” (1:4). To the Jews, John heralded, “The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” And people were deeply moved. Those who heard Baruch’s words “cried, fasted, and prayed to the Lord” (1:5). For those who received John’s message, their “hope began to rise” (3:15). Paul confessed that his “deep feeling” for the Philippians were truthful coming “from the heart of Christ Jesus himself” (1:8).

In the midst of the current disheartening state of affairs which has gripped the natural environment, the world, and our respective communities, it is difficult to imagine HOPE and JOY. Having heard these prophetic acts, how can we be inspired to be their messenger, agent, or catalyst for the society and the Church today?



*May God who has begun a good work in you bring it to fruition.*

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Hung Pham, S.J.  
Assistant Professor of Ignatian Spirituality

December 10

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

[IS 35: 1-10; PS 85:9AB & 10, 11-12, 13-14; LK 5:17-26](#)

Last month, my son and I traveled to Rwanda. One day we drove to a village to visit a pig cooperative made up of people who are genocide survivors and people who were perpetrators of that horror. The man who showed us around the pigpens paused at the end of the tour to tell us his story. He had been a perpetrator during the genocide and spent several years in jail. When he was released, he participated in local reparation projects, but still he felt full of shame. He was afraid to look at anyone in his village and spent most of his time at home alone. One day some widows, who were survivors, invited him to participate in a reconciliation process. He initially did not believe they were serious, but thanks to their persistence eventually agreed to join them. They completed the reconciliation program and then decided to form a cooperative business to make sure that they stay connected. "Now we are friends. If someone is in need, we all help each other," the man concluded.

Sitting with today's readings, I am struck by the paralyzed man's friends. Their commitment to care for him and to find a way where there is none moves Jesus' heart. Like the widows, they actively participate in the work of healing, seeking out the person in their community who is stuck in pain. How can I be a friend like that to people in my community? How can I reach across lines of separation to care for others? The desert and steppe shall bloom. Justice and peace shall kiss. A paralyzed man returns to community. This is the truth of what is possible in Christ.



*Dear God, open the doors of my heart that I may participate in your healing grace.*

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Rose Feerick, M.Div. '02  
Member, Board of Directors

December 11

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

[IS 40: 1-11; PS 96:1-2, 3 & 10AC, 11-12, 13; MT 18:12-14](#)

The tenor of today's readings evokes the soul-stirring, redemptive power of *crying out to God* with an assured, sustained hope. *Give comfort to my people and speak tenderly to them*, God says to the Prophet Isaiah. The message to Israel is this: You are my beloved people whom I approach with intimacy and Divine love, so cry out with a new song of hope because I am about to prepare a way that will make the whole world know of the glory to come. God urges Israel to be unflinching in their faith and to cry out from the mountaintops for, as our responsorial psalm declares, *The Lord our God comes with power!*

This *cry* entails genuine humility, unconditional surrender, faith, and an admission of one's own need for God in the face of sheer despair. It prompts us to ask an awesome, terrifying question: What does it mean to be human? For me, the answer is the courage to love, to hope, the willing to take a risk over and against the status-quo. Ultimately, to be human is to bear witness to a truth that is bigger than all of us.

This is why the Blues is a great source of inspiration for me, because it is on intimate terms with this *cry*. The lyrical dialogue of these musicians is boundless and limitless because they have committed themselves to courageous risk-taking in their music. Courage is bestowed from a God who accompanies us every day, one who speaks to us through our thoughts, emotions, longings, and deepest desires. It is a holy, sacred gift, marked with grace. Take hold of it, embrace it, step out, go deeper inside yourself because you never go alone!

We are challenged to open our hearts and *cry out to God* in a world shot through with cold indifference in the face of the structural evils of racism, poverty, and ecological degradation. As the Gospel reading suggests, we must always hear the *cries* of the Earth, not allowing one voice, one person, one truth to fall astray. This must be our vocation, our life-giving prayer.



*Most merciful God, in these days of Advent, may you grant us the grace to be a hope in our relationships, our communities and in our world today. Fill us with the well-spring of your abundant love to bear witness and struggle for the freedom of all people. Open our hearts and minds to hear the cry of the orphan and the widow in our midst. Amen.*

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Calvin L. Nixon II, M.Div. '21

December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

[ZEC 2:14-17 or RV 11:19A, 12:1-6A, 10AB; JUDITH 13:18BCDE, 19; LK1:26-38 or LK 1:39-47](#)

As much as I love the triumphant Magnificat for its prophetic poetry, I am continually drawn to Mary's questioning of the angel Gabriel in today's readings. She asks, "How can this be?" after the angel Gabriel tells her, "Do not be afraid." Does her question arise from doubt, fear, dismay? Mary becomes human to me in this moment. Mary is our role model for discipleship; modeling how to say yes to the invitations that God extends us. She, who said yes to receiving Jesus as her son and then letting him go towards the cross, teaches us that a relationship with God is charged with grace and challenge. Her fear allowed her to question and to pause in order to respond. Her "yes" was not a naive impulse nor an obliged response. Her yes was a choice she made in fear.

Over the summer, while sitting across migrants in a comedor at the U.S./Mexican border in Nogales, I met many individuals who are making choices with fear. Individuals who have questioned their leaders and their God; individuals who have paused in their migrant journey to ask a powerful nation for asylum. Individuals who have made life threatening choices with fear because they have children to feed and because their governments cannot keep them safe. In the faces of those individuals, risking detention and enduring inhumane circumstances, I saw Mother Mary: young, grace-filled and afraid. In sharing frijoles and tortillas, their questions met my own- my own bewilderment by the polarized culture I live in- and their fear met my own- fear of failure and the unknown. I saw them, and with my gaze, I did my best to love them.

Perhaps I am continually drawn to Mary's questioning because that is where I find myself, yet I know that is not where I am meant to stay. Mary used her fear to take a historic step. Fear leads us towards courageous faith. As we experience our world, as graced and challenged as it is, God is continually calling us: so we question and we pause. But most importantly, we move with our fear.



*Creator God, you know us better than we know ourselves. As we join millions of people celebrating La Virgencita today, remind us of your unconditional love that we are called to emulate. Guide us as we discern the sign of the times in order to live out our vocation. Show us where we need to step up and where we need to step down. But mostly, gently encourage us to accept what you invite us to day by day. Amen.*

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Ana López, M.Div. '17

December 13

Memorial of St. Lucy

[IS 41:13-20; PS 145:1 & 9, 10-11, 12-13AB; MT 11:11-15](#)

Advent is a time of waiting.

In today's first reading we find the Israelites waiting skeptically as they prepare to cross the desert in return from exile. As they wait, God declares this promise: "The afflicted and the needy seek water in vain, their tongues are parched with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them; I, the God of Israel will not forsake them." Despite their doubt, God promises to care for the Israelites in the wilderness.

Reading the Alleluia, we again find Israel waiting, this time as God foreshadows the coming of Christ: "Let the clouds rain down the Just One, and the earth bring forth a Savior." As we journey through Advent, preparing for the birth of Christ, this is a timely reminder.

The Christmas story is one I know well. Each year, I wait in anticipation for the Savior's arrival. Yet despite my abiding faith, I can identify with the Israelites. In recent months, my home state of California has witnessed pain and destruction: a wildfire that destroyed an entire community; gun violence senselessly taking the lives of 12 innocent victims; and refugees seeking asylum at the border being met with tear gas. These events have stoked political and racial tensions across our divided nation. Like the Israelites, I examine the world around me and can't help but feel skeptical as I wait for the fulfillment of God's promise. But in the waiting, in moments when my heart feels like it is breaking for God's people, I am reminded that Jesus is coming, and in Jesus I find great hope.

Waiting, which includes mourning, and aching, and repenting, is part of the Advent journey. As followers of Christ, we wait with joyful hope, because we know that our waiting is followed by celebration.



*God of the ages, prepare our hearts as we wait for the arrival of our Savior. In our waiting, hear our laments as we see and feel the pain around us. In our waiting, turn our doubts into conviction and remind us that Christ is coming. God of the ages, we wait with joyful hope for you to fulfill your promise.*

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Drew Roberts

Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management and Marketing

[IS 48:17-19; PS 1:1-2, 3, 4 & 6; MT 11:16-19](#)

God sounds insecure. The tone of today's readings evinces desire. Not from a cool, detached, theoretical standpoint does God say to Israel, "If you would hearken to my commandments, / your prosperity would be like a river, / and your vindication like the waves of the sea..." This is not a suggestion, but a plea. And not from a heart of idle curiosity does Jesus ask, "To what shall I compare this generation?" This is not an exercise in poetic metaphor but an exasperated lament. God seems to voice a desire for the Israelites to listen and accept God as God is. But this sounds like an insecure God, whose desires and longing come from lack. For the God of all things, who has everything, what does it matter whether we listen or accept God and God's Son? Is today the Advent of this kind of God?

But maybe I'm projecting. Maybe it's not God who's insecure with longing, but me. Maybe God's desire does not come from need, but from overflowing care. God cares for Israel, and wants its prosperity and vindication to flow endlessly like a river or waves, weaving between obstacles, or rhythmically rising above them. God cares for sinners; Jesus wants to be our friend, to eat and drink with us, and not to play along to the old songs of the flute and the dirge.

It is not God or Jesus who needs a listening ear or acceptance, but I who need someone to listen to me, and someone to accept me as I am. Not an insecure God, but the God who desires to secure me and who desires me. Will I listen to the God who wants to listen to me? Will I accept the God who accepts me and befriends me?



*Through the prayers of St. John of the Cross, whose desire for God placed him in the middle of the love of the Divine Persons, and whose memory we celebrate today, may Christ come to us, secure us in his friendship, and save us. Amen.*

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Justin Claravall, S.J., M.Div. '20

December 15

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

[SIR 48:1-4, 9-11; PS 80:2AC & 3B, 15-16, 18-19; MT 17:9A, 10-13](#)

As I write this, the air in Berkeley reeks of smoke from the Camp Fire. On the news, families flee through flames. Where is the joyful hope in calling on Elijah, this “prophet like fire”?

On Calvary, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Several bystanders mocked him, “He’s calling on Elijah! You think Elijah will save him?” Elijah who fights fire with fire, fire in the midst of this bone dry winter, does he come with comfort, restoration or a torch of burning words?

“Elijah has already come.” We look for joyous miracles, but he comes with fury against the greed that tears up the earth and contaminates the waters, against the incendiary hate against refugee caravans. Where do we stand?

On the bus, feeling low, I made my way to the front where a baseball-capped man with sparkling blue eyes frantically waved me down to come sit by him. He talked about his trucking job, of his soon to be last days in prison. He felt so blessed that his employer had appreciated his work, giving him a \$500 bonus. Once he made parole, he had a job lined up, he’d see his three-year-old grandson for the first time, and, with God’s help, he’d never turn back to his old ways. Elijah’s fire had calmed the wrath of God for him, who blessed me in sharing his joy. I almost “did not recognize him,” but the fire in his eyes was unmistakable.



*“Let us see your face, and we shall be saved.” Let us never give up hope for restoration. In our dryness, you come with unexpected refreshment. May we recognize you, whether as Elijah, the Shepherd, or the man on the bus, urging us to sit by you, the burning heart of compassion within and surrounding this world.*

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Mary Beth Lamb

Sr. Administrative Assistant, Student Life and Formation

Ph.D. in the Cultural and Historical Study of Religion, GTU, 1998

December 16

Third Sunday of Advent

[ZEP 3:14-18A; IS 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; PHIL 4:4-7; LK 3:10-18](#)

Today's readings repeat the same exhortation in varying terms:

Rejoice!

Exult!

Sing!

Shout!

Why? Because this liturgical time marks a season of celebrating the arrival of Emmanuel, God with us. This kind of joy flies in the face of the empty sentimentality often sold by a commercial Christmas that peddles self-indulgence and materialism. The invitation to gladness in these texts does not encourage feigned exuberance or artificial happiness but humble hospitality to the unexpectedly vulnerable manifestation of God as an infant and genuine faith firmly rooted in the reality of God's surprising salvation.

The first list of imperatives is accompanied by a second set:

Do not fear!

Be courageous!

Don't be anxious!

Be not discouraged!

Why? Because recipients of the good news desperately need encouragement, strength, and hope. Zephaniah announces not only the Lord's presence but also the end of judgment, the halting of enemy forces, and the reversal of misfortune. This change of circumstance is not a feigned stillness or a manufactured optimism; this is a full-blown, courageous opposition to the reality of death-dealing forces reeking havoc on God's people, threatening relationships, peace, survival, faith.

Therefore, as we rejoice, we do not deny lingering laments, the sting of sin, the trauma of death, the fragility of our existence. Rather, we intentionally lean into the real, eternal effects of the arrival of a Savior who

Rejoices over you with gladness;

Sings over you;

Renews you with his love!

As we prepare our hearts like John's disciples, we ask, "What should we do" in response to this love? First, we can savor truly glad tidings and soak in the real joy of the season. But we must also prepare the way of the Lord, who is coming again to deal the final blow to sorrow, violence, injustice, sickness, sin, and death.



*Savior, thank you that your arrival ushered in joy instead of fear, hope instead of anxiety. We rejoice that you took on human flesh to bring us salvation. We rejoice that you still live in us. And yet we carry to you our prayerful petitions in a world seemingly gone mad. We struggle to respond to your generous love and to fearlessly await your coming redemption. Please allow the good news to bring us peace, to encourage our hearts, and to inspire concrete acts of generosity, justice, contentment, and faith.*

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Amanda Kaminski

Director of Academic Advising and Support Services

Academic Year Lecturer in Christian Spirituality



[GN 49:2, 8-10; PS 72:1-2, 3-4AB, 7-8, 17; MT 1:1-17](#)

The genealogy of Jesus Christ opens Matthew's Gospel. With the long litany of strange-sounding names – 47 by my count – we are tempted to skim quickly to get to the next chapter, which begins the familiar and dramatic story of Jesus' birth. Resist the temptation because the Gospel writer has something important to say to us today: Jesus, who is God-with-us, had a human family.

Jesus' family was far from perfect. If we read the biblical histories of Jesus' relatives, we realize that Jesus' family was a motley crew. Surely, many of Jesus' ancestors were holy and noble. Others, however, shock us by their misdeeds and sin. Nevertheless, God still chose this complicated family to come close to us.

From the very beginning, Jesus was comfortable being with all kinds of people, saints and sinners alike. God continues to be comfortable being with us today, on good days and on bad. God still labors in our complicated and far-from-perfect families. We don't need to run away from our humanity, for Jesus – like us in all things but sin – never did.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus' genealogy is our own. Through our baptism and shared humanity, we are grafted onto Jesus' family tree, which is deeply rooted in Jewish soil and extends far beyond. Today, we might not only pray with Jesus' genealogy, but also with our own family tree. In doing so, we stay rooted in the One who made his home in our human family.



*Lord, help me to embrace my humanity and that of others in all of our blessedness and brokenness. Reveal to me today the holiness that lurks in all that is human.*

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Kevin O'Brien, S.J.  
Dean of the Jesuit School of Theology

December 18

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

[JER 23:5-8; PS 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19; MT 1:18-25](#)

We are now a week away from Christmas. Naturally, we anticipate the arrival of the infant in the manger. We might even begin to conjure beloved images from our childhood: Mary, Joseph, the infant lying in the straw, shepherds, angels singing in the heavens, perhaps even Magi.

Today's Gospel from Matthew evokes these powerful images: Joseph is bewildered by Mary's pregnancy and plans to quietly divorce her, but his intentions are derailed by the message from an angel. Joseph is told to name this child Jesus, and all of this is done to fulfill the message of Isaiah. We can picture where this is headed: Bethlehem!

Yet today's first reading reminds us of another aspect of this infant who will be laid in a manger: he is a leader who secures justice. This trait of the infant can shake us from our Christmas fantasies and remind us of our challenge as Christians. This infant will be a "righteous shoot," shall "reign and govern wisely," shall be called, "The Lord, our justice." The psalm continues with this theme; this infant is the "king's son" who will govern "with justice." This one shall "rescue the poor," will "have pity on the lowly and the poor."

As we prepare for Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, let us delight in the images surrounding Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. But let us also realize the profound countercultural challenge of an infant who brings about justice so "the whole earth" may be "filled with his glory," the glory reflecting the kingdom of God.



*Lord Jesus, as we prepare to welcome you as an infant, powerless and poor, may we also focus our attention on our brothers and sisters who are powerless and poor in our world today. They challenge us to live out the deep meaning of your birth in the manger. Help us to bring about the Reign of God that you envisioned and sought to bring about.*

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Bruce Lescher  
Senior Lecturer Emeritus in Christian Spirituality

December 19

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

[JGS 13:2-7, 24-25A; PS 71:3-4A, 5-6AB, 16-17; LK 1:5-25](#)

The two women portrayed in today's readings were great mothers, but only after great pain. Manoah's Wife and Elizabeth were barren and heart-broken. For they knew, "Where Children are not Heaven is not". However, **hope** never diminished in their lives. Literally, the Lord fulfilled what Manoah's wife and Elizabeth had hoped and prayed for. The first became the mother of Samson, the strongest man who ever lived, and second bore a son who would be declared by Jesus, "the greatest man born of a woman". "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!" (Ps 113:9).

It is easy to feel distraught or feel dejected when things don't happen in the way we would like - unmet deadlines, constrained friendships, fear of loneliness, sarcastic remarks thrown our way. In these moments, we might experience a sort of barrenness similar to the struggle of the two ladies referenced today. We might cry out, "Why isn't the Lord doing anything about my problem?" Friends, for me this cry itself is a **prayer of hope**. Hang on with Hope in the Lord! At the best time and right moment, the Lord will lift all brokenness and make us exceedingly fruitful. The Lord will arrange angels to transmit the good news of Hope.



*Dear Lord, like the two great mothers shown today, give us the grace to "pray without ceasing" and wait in Joyful Hope (Thes 5:17). Like the two angels who brought good news, help me be an angel of hope to a friend next door who might be in some pain or brokenness.*

*May this prayer of Hope from Habakkuk be mine:*

*Even though the fig trees have no blossoms,  
and there are no grapes on the vines;  
even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren;  
even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD!  
I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!  
(Hab 3:17-18)*

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Sudha Arul, I.B.V.M., S.T.L. '19

December 20

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

[IS 7:10-14; PS 24:1-2, 3-4AB, 5-6; LK 1:26-28](#)

I love looking at the origin of words and names because the result is often poetic. Once, when I was trying to understand how Jesus' suffering could also be considered loving, I discovered that the etymology of suffering is "to bear up under." If we are suffering, God is with us because Jesus is bearing up under those who suffer. It does not mean suffering is easy, but it does mean that we are never alone.

As I pray with Luke's Annunciation, I am delighted by the poetry of this moment when the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Mary. In Hebrew, Gabriel means "God is my strength." I think about Mary as a tough, young girl in Roman-occupied Galilee praying to God for strength. Mary's name means "bitter" in Hebrew because it is derived from Miriam, Moses' sister, who grew up enduring the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Mary's name is a reminder that God can make a way out of no way, which is why we need strength when things seem impossible.

Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid and that she would conceive and bear a son named Jesus. My name, Joshua, shares a root with Jesus' name in Hebrew. Both Joshua and Yeshua mean "God is salvation" or "God saves." I like to imagine Mary sitting up straighter when she heard Gabriel's idea for a baby name. Sure beats Heathcliff, Hubert, or Ahaz!

Mary was probably familiar with the passage from Isaiah which foretold of Emmanuel, or "God is with us" being sent to bear up under and save the people in exile. While Mary stared into Gabriel's glow I imagine her face warm with hope and possibility because she was being reminded once again that "nothing will be impossible for God."



*God of light and hope, be with us today. You are our strength, Jesus, please bear up under our daily struggle and announce to us once again that we are not alone. This Advent, shine your light in the darkness and let your Holy Spirit renew us, guide us, and save us. Amen.*

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Joshua Peters, S.J., M.Div. '20

[SG 2:8-14 or ZEP 3:14-18A; PS 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; LK 1:39-45](#)

It is only a few days until Christmas. Just days until our collective season of vigil culminates in the celebration of Emmanuel: God with us. How appropriate that the readings today have such a sense of immediacy. The longing of the lover for the beloved can't contain itself. His love has pulled him across expanses. Our anticipation for the main event can rev up our excitement, speed up our preparations, and have us zeroing in on the finish line. We anticipate the joy and peace of final arrival of Christ in our midst. Does Christ long in the same way for us?

In the image of the lover he leaps and bounds, reaches in through the windows, and calls the beloved out of waiting and into a new life together. He calls them out of the winter's darkness and sleep into abundant new life and light of spring. In our Gospel, Jesus' presence is so imminent that it reaches and calls to all present. God's love is so real and so close that it causes John to leap and Elizabeth to sing and praise. I am struck by how visceral God's longing seems here. Most of us know what it's like to be impatient and want something so badly you can feel it in your body. Your mouth waters, your fingers tingle, maybe you have to take deep breaths. What does it mean if God's own self is lovingly impatient for us? Perhaps this is something of what Mary would have contemplated, being specifically called in a unique way to bring that loving longing into the world. With a dark and troubling year coming to an end, it brings me comfort that just as I long to know light and hope, the source of all light and hope is longing to be known.



*God-with-us, made known through Mary's womb,  
We long to know your presence, as You long for us in love.*

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Susan Foster, M.Div. '16

December 22

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

[SM 1:24-28; 1 SAMUEL 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8ABCD; LK 1:46-56](#)

As we get ever closer to Christmas, final preparations are on our minds, including selecting the last few perfect presents, wrapping them, and waiting for the joy on our loved ones' faces as they take them out from under the tree Christmas morning.

In today's readings, we see God as the giver of all gifts. In the Temple in Shiloh, Hannah gives thanks for the gift of her son Samuel, for whom she had fervently prayed and who God has given to her. In the Gospel, Mary proclaims the greatness of God. In doing so, she not only gives thanks for the gift of her child, but also for God's gifts of justice and mercy.

God finds joy in giving us these gifts, the same joy we experience when a loved one appreciates and finds happiness in a gift we choose for them. Imagine the face of God smiling upon you, laughing alongside you as you gratefully receive the gifts God has provided. Your happiness makes God happy.

In the first reading, Hannah goes even farther. Having gratefully accepted the gift of her son Samuel, she returns this gift to the glory of God. Her sacrifice is tremendous; God does not ask such a sacrifice of many. God instead looks for our small acknowledgements of the gifts we have received. Our God rejoices when you embody the gift of musicality in singing, when you embody the gift of compassion in listening deeply to others, when you embody the gift of love in offering hospitality. Our God rejoices when you use the divine gifts given to you. By using God's gifts, we both let God act through us and we praise God. How will you use the gifts you have been given to praise God?



*Loving and joyful God, grant us the grace to accept the gifts you so generously provide.  
May we offer the fruits of these gifts to those around us and in doing so praise your holy name.  
Let us take the strong women of Hannah and Mary as examples in our lives.  
Help us to embody your justice and mercy.  
Amen.*

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Ellen Jewett, M.Div. '20

December 23

Fourth Sunday of Advent

[MI 5:1-4A; PS 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; HEB 10:5-10; LK 1:39-45](#)

The acclaimed Christian story-teller C.S. Lewis is best known for his *Chronicles of Narnia*, a magical *tour de force* of Christian imagination. He liked to refer to the story of Christmas as the greatest story ever told. Anthropologists tell us that stories are among the most prized sources of meaning and impact on people's lives. Why did Lewis maintain that the Christmas story is *the greatest story ever told* and what is its impact on your life? At the end of our Advent journey today's readings lay it out very well: God takes on our humanity in the most stunning of ways being born to a young Jewish girl in a forgotten little town. The mystery of the Incarnation takes shape in the bewildering *simplicity* of this pregnancy and birth. God works to save you and me in history, in the simplicity and hiddenness of human life *the way it is* and not the way we would imagine it. God becomes human and saves us by taking on the lowly and raising it to the sublime. Christmas then invites us to pay attention, to stimulate our imaginations, to encounter the divine in the humility and obscurity of ordinary life, what goes on daily in our lives. God is "laboring"-- as St. Ignatius of Loyola liked to say-- in the reality of life the way it is, in the small and everyday events. His love, as it were, is taking flesh moment by moment.

An intriguing saying ascribed to St. Ignatius goes like this: "Not to be confined by what is greater, but to be concerned with what is smaller: this is divine." The Christmas story provides a dazzling glimpse of how God can be encountered in all things large and small beyond all the dualism and dichotomies we can invent. This Sunday's readings and the story of Christmas tell us that indeed we live in an *enchanted* world suffused by God's grace. The spirit of Christmas awakens us to the beauty of God's grace that is so often hidden in clear sight.



*Loving God, help me especially at this beautiful time of reunion with family and friends to deeply savor the amazement and beauty of your Incarnation. Open my eyes and ears to the movements of inspiration and grace in both the smallest and greatest details of my daily life. May my daily prayer be a time of taking a loving look at what is most real-- the joys, pains, and sorrows-- to see them from your divine perspective of mercy and love. May every day renew in me a deeper sense of how you are to be found in all things, and suffuse me with the peace that only you can give through Christ our Lord born in Bethlehem for us.*

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Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., M.Div. '76  
Member, Board of Directors

[2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16; PS 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 & 29; LK 1:67-79](#)

In a few hours we will celebrate the event that splits human history, qualitatively, into “before” and “after,” into longing and fulfillment. The Nativity story is so captivating that we can easily miss the ironic synopsis of the true meaning of Christmas captured in today’s first reading, from Second Samuel. There, King David, flush with political success, grandly proposes to share his royal glory with Yahweh, whose presence is symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, now housed in a tent while David dwells regally in his palace. David proposes to build God a suitable house!

We can almost hear God’s patient chuckle. Before Nathan can deliver this “good news” to God, God speaks to the prophet. Playing on the double meaning of “house” as a physical dwelling and “house” as a royal dynasty, God sends Nathan to tell the king that it is not he who will build God a house, but God, the true King, who has established the House of David by an everlasting covenant -- a covenant that we readers know is fulfilled in Jesus, the newborn Prince of Peace.

The heart of the mystery of the Incarnation is that God, in becoming human in Jesus, has unleashed in history the dynamics of the “Great Reversal.” A stable is the royal throne room; an Infant is the great king; a virgin gives birth; a tyrant is dethroned by a child; the poor are the true rich; the meek possess the earth; the hungry are sated; the persecuted prevail; the Cross is the throne of God. Zecharias’s “Benedictus,” heralding the birth of Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist, is the prelude for Mary’s “Magnificat,” celebrating this eschatological regime, which will become the anthem of the non-violent Reign of the Prince of Peace.

We will have grasped the true meaning of Christmas when, rather than trying to “build a house” for God according to our “royal” blueprints, we embrace the dynamics of the Great Reversal, become like little children. God became human that we might become divine, a child that we might grow up. He died that we might live. But, paradoxically, God does “need” us foot-in-mouth “Davids”, the way a mother baking Christmas cookies needs the clumsy help of her child, because in the process of “helping” God transform the world we will become God’s true children.



*Jesus, Savior of the world, we rejoice in your birth which is the foundation of God’s great plan of salvation. Teach us to follow humbly God’s blueprint, the pattern of your life, rather than trying to re-draw it according to our delusions of glory, so that as we contribute our small efforts to God’s great construction in You we may become living stones in that divine House that will one day shelter the whole family of the New Creation.*

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Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M.

Professor Emerita of New Testament and Spirituality



December 25

Christmas Day

[IS 52:7-10; PS 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; HEB 1:1-6; JN 1:1-18](#)

Does God want what you want for Christmas? We all love to receive gifts. Remember some of your childhood favorites. I still remember vividly my first two-wheeled bike. What adventures it promised. It's the gift, the giver and the gifts' possibilities that bring us joy. Furthermore, we all appreciate gratitude for our gifts given. Gratitude deepens our bonds and multiplies our joy.

Gifts remind us of the wondrous deeds God has done and is doing. God has spoken and is speaking through his Son: a God who has shared his life, a God who has given and will give his life as a light for the human race, a God who becomes poor and vulnerable, human, tangible, hopeful. God is a gift giver wanting our joy.

After the pain of childbirth, Mary held her boy child. She examines him from head to toe, a healthy boy. Mary looked up at Joseph and put the child into his calloused hands. Like any parents they are awestruck by this new life. Both are imagining all they want for this child. As Isaiah foretold "Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not. Here is your God...he comes to save us.". We are invited to imagine with Mary and Joseph and be transformed into a people who bring good news, who are good news, who hear the angels singing.



*God, we remember how many ways have you shared your life with us. Often we are too busy, too preoccupied, too self-absorbed, yet you neither lose hope, nor stop offering. Save us again O Savior of the world. Transform us into bringers of good news. Let our joyful hearts praise you as we treasure today the gift of your Son and share with Mary and Joseph the dreams and hopes of wanting what you want for all of us this Christmas.*

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George Murphy, S.J.

Director of Spiritual Formation and Lecturer in Christian Spirituality

December 26

Feast of St. Stephen

[ACTS 6:8-10, 7:54-59; PS 31:3CD-4, 6 & 8AB, 16BC & 17; MT 10:17-22](#)

Today, we collectively exhale and bask in festivities, enjoying time with loved ones. It's ironic that during the joy of Christmas, it is the feast day of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. We are reminded today why we are Christian and what we receive from that gift.

In the first reading, Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, sees the heavens open, revealing God and Jesus in all their glory. Despite being rejected, driven out, and stoned, Stephen's last words were "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Sound familiar? The responsorial psalm response is "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." Again, Jesus' dying words. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus also warns of the persecution his disciples will suffer for his sake.

Doom and gloom at first glance for Christians! Why would anyone sign up for that? Looking closer, we see we are not alone. Jesus reassures us not to worry; if we endure, we will be saved. Psalm 31 encourages us to rely on God as a rock, a refuge, a stronghold to give us safety, and a fortress.

Emulating Jesus, Stephen trusted in God and died forgiving his persecutors. Will we be faced with this as Christians? Probably not, but Jesus calls us to rise against injustices, responding in radical compassion, love, and forgiveness. We may be persecuted because of our beliefs but turning to God as our rock and refuge can help us have enduring faith.

Basking in the Christmas glow, we take comfort and feel joy in being a Christian. The love we feel so acutely during Christmas as we celebrate God's gift of Jesus, and the love of those around us, can be visible signs of the refuge that God invites us to encounter. As Christians, we can draw upon this love in the face of daily challenges.



*Loving God, thank you for the gift of Jesus as a reminder of our joy during Christmas. Let us remember the glow of these days when challenges come. May we turn to you, our rock and refuge, when being a Christian is difficult. Give us strength to feel the joy and glory of the Christmas season always, and to never give up or feel abandoned by you, our constant and loving creator and companion.*

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Sarah Bonini  
Assistant Director, Service and Spirituality  
Alumni Relations at Santa Clara University

December 27

Feast of St John, Apostle and evangelist

[1 JN 1:1-4; PS 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12; JN 20:1A & 2-8](#)

I am still savoring the joy of Christmas; and gospel of today throws me into Easter. A bit strange! But it does make sense when I reflect on everyday events that introduce us to different realities of human life.

The crucifixion brought earth-shattering experiences among Jesus' followers. So too, I had similar experiences when I lost my mother. I have seen many deaths, from my grandmother to my father, from my sister to my uncle; losing all these important people in my family. But losing my mother – it was unimaginable. The whole earth shook under my feet for a while. Thus, I can well imagine what Jesus' followers would have experienced after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The experience of the moment is important, yet what is even more important is what you do next. What do you hold on to in such moment to have faith in God? What keeps you steady and strong? For me, it was the memories of my mother. The memories of her love, her words of encouragement, her whole life that she dedicated to her children. These memories are what kept me strong and kept me going.

For the disciples, what they needed was to remember their faith and keep their hope in Jesus. John did this exactly. He remembered what Jesus had taught. John's Gospel rightly tells us, "he saw and believed." How about us? How strong is our faith in Jesus when there is a lot happening in our lives and in the church? What anchor do we use to stay close to God in the turbulent time of our lives?



*Grant us O Lord, grace to trust only in you. Strengthen us to come out of our individual shells, and lead us into the streets where people are bruised and hurt, to nurture and nourish their body and soul, and in doing so, may our joy of life be complete, Amen. (adopted from Evangelii Gaudium 49)*

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Amit Roshan Lakra, S.J., M.Div. '18, Th.M. '19

December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents

[1 JN 1:5-2:2; PS 123:2-3, 4-5, 7CD-8; MT 2:13-18](#)

The feast of the Holy Innocents plunges us into the realities of our world. The first reading calls us to be children of the light while the Gospel reading from Matthew speaks of the slaughter of the innocents. While the Light has indeed come into the world, which we celebrate with the joy of Christmas, there is still darkness and shadow present. It has been said that the shadow of the cross hangs over the manger in Bethlehem. This passage of Matthew foreshadows the whole Gospel story as the darkness seeks to snuff out the Light of Jesus' life and mission which is God's inclusion, love, and compassion for all. This is where the mystery of the incarnation lives. This is where we know that God suffers with broken, shadowed humanity. How do we see the violence and darkness of Herod playing out in our world today? The separation of immigrant mothers from their children, the incidences of gun violence that pierce our nation's heart, the sex abuse crisis in our church and the trafficking of the innocents in our world come to mind.

Joseph listened to the message of an angel in a dream and moved in the cover of night to take his family to a safe place. In Joseph we find a man open to God's revelation who is willing to act to preserve the child of promise. How often do we become paralyzed by fear and darkness? Do we hear around us voices that speak truth to power today? Who are the ones who work to overturn injustices and who help us to find ways to carry God's compassion and mercy for all of creation? How do we lend our voices to bring inclusion and kinship to a broken world? How do we accompany the Rachels of today whose lamentation and keening we hear?



*Creator God, Spirit of Light, help us to hear and recognize your Presence among us and enkindle our hearts with your compassion to accompany those who are lost in darkness.*

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Lynne Lukenbill  
Graduate Program in Pastoral Ministries, Santa Clara University

December 29

The Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas

[1 JN 2:3-11; PS 96:1-2A, 2B-3, 5B-6; LK 2:22-35](#)

When Simeon takes the infant Jesus into his arms, he gives thanks that he has lived to see the coming of the Messiah. The simple prayer of an old man, ultimately incorporated into the Church's daily prayer as the *Nunc Dimittis*, is recited every night during Compline.

Simeon describes Jesus as "a light to reveal you to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel." The Greek word we translate as "nations"--*ethnon*--has the more specific meaning here of the Gentiles, the nations surrounding Israel who worshipped other gods. Israel had often suffered at the hands of those nations and had worked hard to remain faithful and preserve its ancestral traditions.

Yet there was always a strand in those traditions that held that one day Jew and Gentile would overcome their ancient enmity. Both Isaiah and Micah speak of a time when "all nations" will come to Jerusalem to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob together (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1). Simeon's words evoke Isaiah's vision of the Servant of the Lord being a "light for the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6).

We live in a time when dangerous forms of nationalism and ethnic chauvinism have reasserted themselves around the world. This Christmas season, we should remember Simeon's vision of the Messiah as one who brings a message of *universal* salvation and justice, one that breaks down walls between peoples and reweaves the bonds of our human community.



*Lord Jesus,*

*Help me to remember that you are not only the Lord of those who look like me, speak my language, or share my culture. Let me repent of those times when I have forgotten it. Give me the grace to see others as you see them and the courage to reach out in friendship and solidarity. Amen.*

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J. Peter Nixon, M.A. '08

[SIR 3:2-6, 12-14 PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5; COL 3:12-21; LK 2:41-52](#)

I have often been asked how my parents reacted to my decision to become a Jesuit, especially since I'm an only child. The concise (and true) answer has been that they have been very supportive. Yet today's readings for the Feast of the Holy Family evoke memories of the initial conversations we shared about my vocational aspirations. Jesus' attraction to the community of teachers and his confident declaration to his parents that he "must be in my Father's house" reminds me of the gradual process of explaining to my parents who this 'new' family of religious priests and brothers were and why I felt called to join them.

While explaining a vocation to ministry in the church certainly prompts greater scrutiny from one's family these days because of its unconventional aspects, the core dynamics at work are similar whenever children transitioning to adulthood present their dreams and underlying ideals before their parents. Today's feast prompts us to reflect on the times when we have entered into those anxiety-inducing dialogues – probably for all of us as budding adults, and for some of us as apprehensive parents. In our reading from Sirach, we are reminded of our responsibility to reverence and comfort our parents throughout our lives and theirs. Learning to talk honestly with our parents about adventures, aspirations, and emerging priorities provides a sacred manner of honoring them, especially in our society where adult children often journey far away from their families of origin. Unfortunately, there are many instances when misunderstanding prevails, and hurt feelings can linger for years. Perhaps we can find consolation when we consider the tension that played out in the Holy Family as they returned to Nazareth. By reflecting on the memories of a shared experience, they laid a roadbed for Jesus to walk in the ways of the Lord with his parents' blessing.



*Jesus, through your Incarnation you entered the complexity of family life. Encourage us to cherish both the support and the challenge we have experienced within our families of origin. Give us a share in your wisdom that transforms misunderstanding into blessing. And even when our paths in life diverge, may we discover unity in following your will and building God's kingdom. Amen.*

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James Ferus, S.J., M.Div. '20

[1 JN 2:18-21; PS 96:1-2, 11-12, 13; JN 1:1-18](#)

On New Year's Eve, I feel the pressure to tidily sum up the meaning of the past 365 days, skimming over broad-reaching news summaries of important events and reminding myself of my own personal 2018 newsreel. I feel the need to synthesize and compactly package the year into comprehensible and well-defined moments.

This day of simple sound bites and easy clarity stands in contrast to today's Gospel reading. John's Gospel is beautifully complex, particularly these introductory verses. Who is Jesus Christ? And what does this question mean for us believers? John's answer is not neatly packaged nor straightforward, placing the meaning of the text beyond time. We are told, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." (JN 1:1-2) This revelation is not easily understood, and maybe it's not meant to be.

When I travel home for the holidays, I am always grateful for the opportunity to have long conversations with my brother. My brother, who avoided institutional religion as soon as he could, is unfamiliar with anything beyond basic Catholic terms and understandings. And so I find it particularly engaging when we get into philosophical and theological conversations. Our words, terms, and labels for the topics we discuss rarely align. Yet, when we move past these differences, there is a deeper consonance in our understandings. When I forgo theological terminology and instead describe my experiences of God in my own words, I find a deep resonance within myself, and within the moment of sharing and kinship with my sibling. Freed of familiar words and presumed meaning, I fall deeper into my encounter with God.

As I swim in the complex poetry of John's Gospel, as the new dawn of the year approaches, I wonder how I may allow this openness, my own small grasp on truth, to enliven my understanding of time slowly marching on.



*God of truth and grace, enliven in me your presence as the dawn of the new year approaches.  
Amen.*

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Caroline Read, M.A. '18

January 1

The Octave Day of Christmas

[NM 6:22-27; PS 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; GAL 4:4-7; LK 2:16-21](#)

January 1st excites us. Our imaginations thrill with glimpses of what might be. On the first day, of the first month of the new year, in the dawn of limitless possibilities, we cross the threshold from dark to light, from same old to just maybe. The nativity stories invite us to share in the sacred wonder: the shepherds' amazement at an infant's birth; a young mother's blessed bewilderment; a messiah born into poverty and obscurity. God's Christmas grace animates us for a holy beginning - once again - because we are reminded that the unprecedented, unanticipated is emerging before our eyes!

How do we make sense of the world God is creating in our midst? As spirits enfleshed yet oriented toward eternal life, we live between already and not yet. Our waiting in advent darkness is over; we profess that already our savior was born, suffered, died and rose to new life. Still, our lives unfold in strife and suffering because we have not yet embraced God's blessings for us. We witness the striking contradiction between the glad tidings of Jesus' birth and the reality of the earth overheating and burning, of so many stunted lives despite unfathomable ease in other quarters, and of the unjust allocation of burdens and benefits in our nation and across the globe.

Still, this is the season of joyful hope. So the realities of our times do not counsel us to abandon hope but to lean in – to commit fully. The unprecedented Christmas promise is Emmanuel – God with us. As incarnation people, we are called to be the blessing God promised to the Israelites. We must smile graciously upon those we encounter; we must act kindly and bring peace. Let us recklessly embrace a new way of living – living as blessing and hope with all the radical possibilities this opens for our sisters and brothers in this new day.



*May we bless and keep safe our sisters and brothers in this new day. Yes, indeed!*

*May we share welcoming delight with the people we encounter in this new day. Yes, indeed!*

*May we give ourselves to peace and non-violence in all we say and do in this new day. Yes, indeed!*

*May we be God's blessing in the world, through the Child Christ in the Spirit of Wonder, in this new day. Yes, indeed!*

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