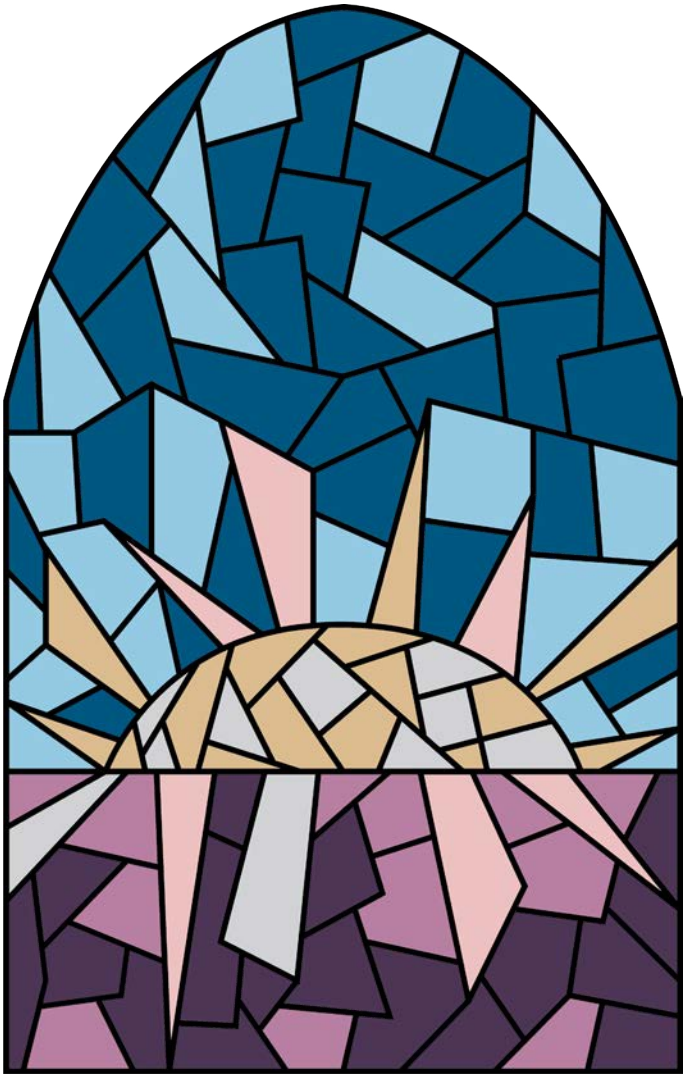
Come, O Come Emmanuel



Meditations for Advent 2025
By the members of Christ Church, Macon, Georgia

Introduction

The Rev. Cynthia Knapp
Rector

After Chet and I had been friends for many years, our first "date" was on an August night at Waveny, a park in town with a wide-open lawn that was perfect for star gazing. It was during the Perseid meteor shower, and we must have seen hundreds of shooting stars that night. By the time we were ready to head back home the park had closed and the gates were locked, so the only way we could get out was across the field toward the high school. We were in my family's Volkswagen bug convertible, so it wasn't exactly an "off-road" vehicle. I was behind the wheel while Chet walked in front in the headlights to make sure I didn't hit a rock or get stuck in a hole in the ground. We made it through without incident, but it did turn star gazing into an adventure that we look back on with a smile.

Advent, which means coming or arrival, is one of those paradoxes in the Christian faith in that we are awaiting the Lord Jesus who has already come. Even though we yet await his second coming, we await his coming at Christmas even as he is with us in the waiting. He is our light in this dark world that helps us navigate the potential bumps in the way or pitfalls that we could fall into. He strengthens the weary and brings back the lost. Even as we seek to prepare the way for his coming, he is the one who shows us the way—the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Advent was first observed in Spain and Gaul as a season of preparing new converts for baptism on the feast of Epiphany. Like Lent, it was a penitential period. By the 6th century the season was linked to the coming of Christ and by the 9th century it was fixed to the four weeks leading up to Christmas with the first Sunday of Advent being designated as the beginning of the liturgical year. Thus, we now begin each year with preparing our hearts and lives for the coming of Christ. With the Lord's help we seek to remove those obstacles that would prevent us from living for Him. He lights the way for us in the darkness of this world as we seek to avoid the pitfalls and follow his call in our lives. Each year is an opportunity for new beginnings, a time of hitting refresh in our Christian journey. It's a time of asking ourselves, "Am I preparing the way for Christ in this world? Am I leading others into a deeper knowledge and awareness of Him, or am I creating an obstacle for others to believe?" We ask the Lord to help us see where we might need to prepare the way in our own lives and to prepare the way for others through acts and words of kindness and compassion.

This booklet is a series of meditations that are each based on one of the Scriptures from the lectionary readings for that day. They are written by Christ Church parishioners- some have been with us for all their lives; some are new arrivals. We hope their witness will help you prepare the way for the coming of Jesus in your own heart. Truly it is a road we walk together; a journey we make as we bear one another's burdens and rejoice together in the Lord. Blessing to you this Advent!

"Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."
— Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, Matthew 3:3

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and his name shall be called **Emmanuel**"

which means, **God with us**.

— Matthew 1:22–23

Romans 13:12–14
Katherine Hudson

Week One · Day One
Sunday, November 30

Every year when Advent comes into view on the calendar, I have the same thought: time for the incessant and cloyingly cheerful Christmas music played in every store, and on every radio station, twenty-four-seven–until the morning of December the twenty-sixth. And for a moment, I let myself hate the early and vigorous celebrations as cheesy and overdone and ignorant of The Right Way To Do Things. But then I read this scripture in choir rehearsal every year, and I think of the way we as Anglicans view Advent.

It's a peaceful time, and a time of preparation for the Nativity of the Lord, the same as every year before, but like every year it's somehow always different, too. Each year brings new baggage with it, brings things along with us that we don't like to admit to doing, or having been part of; or people we don't want to associate with anymore. We try to hide them, even if we're not ashamed of the things we've done, necessarily–we try to pretend that we've never done anything wrong, or made those egregious mistakes like Other People.

We try to look down on the Christmas music that people play before and during Advent, because we think that of course, ours is the right way to do things. It's just How Things Are. It's easy to stay in our comfortable lives, in the dimness that we've grown used to with the accumulation of our faults that we've always known around us, like the way knick-knacks are arranged on a favorite side table at grandma's house. It rarely if ever changes without a push from somewhere, and there is comfort in that stability: but stability is not what this scripture is about. It's about using this time to help us to let go of those things that keep us from God–the guilt, the shame, the drunken orgies we don't want to advertise at church, things we're afraid of.

But Christ is coming back for us, no matter what state we're in, and sooner than we think. We don't know exactly when, but soon. And when He does, we should be prepared–the precise thing Advent lets us be. It gives us calm when there is chaos and rush in the world, it gives us space where there are crowds, it lets us unburden ourselves anew so we can be open for Christ to come into our lives. But it's not just excising things out of ourselves that's important: it's becoming whole again by letting go of what is keeping us in the place of sin: the place of missing God's mark. Psalm 122 tells us that "Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself", and it is that unity that this scripture exhorts us to attain, not just a Puritanical life of asceticism, because some guy back in AD 57 said so. It's the same story with one of my favorite hymns during Advent, whose words I recommend keeping near to your heart this year as we prepare for the coming of the Lord–the same as every year, but like every year, entirely new.

Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding: Christ is nigh, it seems to say. Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day!

The night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

—Romans 13:12-14

Week One · Day Two
Monday, December 1

Psalm 96
Caroline Neal

In June I had the privilege of taking a narrative theology class sponsored by Columbia's Union Seminary in NYC and taught by Padraig O Tuama, poet, theologian, and conflict mediator. Using this analysis process on today's scripture, I generated more questions than answers.

What is the new song? Is it sharing your faith with another? Could it be a change in behavior or attitude? Is the new song, a foreshadowing of the birth of Jesus? Who is all the Earth? Could we substitute the word neighbor for all the Earth? Should we contemplate who our neighbors are?

The Psalmist's words sound like a command, not a suggestion to me. The imperative words are sing, a new song and all the Earth. What if we were to rearrange the words? "A new song is sung by all the Earth." Or "All the Earth sings a new song." Or "A song sung to all the Earth causes a newness."

My first reaction, I think probably a typical 2025 American response was one of irritation. I'm an independent woman and don't like anyone dictating to me how I should live my life, but, as I meditated on the scripture, I started humming the 1971 Coca-Cola song's lyrics, "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" and my heart opened.

"I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love.
Grow apple trees and honeybees and snow-white turtle doves.
I'd like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony."

Hearing the Psalmist's words as a call to action, I hope to respond to this Season with a renewed commitment to sharing my joy in the Lord with my neighbors. When I was a preteen, my dad said, "Life is great, but if you believe in God, life will be technicolor." I fell for his argument hook, line and sinker. Irenaeus of Lyon a prominent early Christian famously stated, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive and to be alive consists of beholding God."

Hopefully, Dad's, Irenaeus of Lyon's, the Psalmist's or possibly my words will entice you to sing, sing, sing at the top of your lungs, to live a technicolor life and to behold God, not just for Advent but for all of 2026. My friends, family and I are exhausted by the constant barrage of hate and are thirsty to hear the alternative refreshing message of love. Let's take the lead and see if the world is changed.

Dear Lord,
During this Season of Light, let us be the light through our thoughts, words and deeds. Open our hearts to accept many methods and sources to study Scripture. Let us rejoice in our right to academic freedom. May we remember our cloud of witnesses and traditions that brought us to our faith and give thanks for them. Give us the will to share our good news in an inclusive manner with a world that desperately needs to hear it.
Amen

O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord; bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
— Psalm 96:1–3

2 Peter 1:16–21
Phil Ezell

Week One · Day Three
Tuesday, December 2

Do you know what it means to be in darkness?

My family and I often visit our cattle ranch in North Florida. The ranch was started by my great grandfather and subsequent generations have been stewards of it. The land is mostly open pastures with large, old oaks, green pastures, ponds and an occasional palmetto tree. When the skies are clear, the blue contrasts the green in the open spaces creating a postcard like beauty. On clear evenings, the sky is like a canopy of stars that seem to hover overhead providing reflections on the ponds and the ability to walk the property freely with little assistance. Yet this is not always true.

There are nights when the cloud cover blocks the stars and the darkness is so overwhelming it is not possible to see your hand in front of your face. Walking across the property without a flashlight is risky and perhaps even a bit frightening. In the midst of such darkness, there is a sense of hopelessness, of inability, frustration, and need—but light changes everything.

Darkness can be both physical and spiritual. The Apostle in 2 Peter 1:16-21 is speaking to our spiritual need. The world is in spiritual darkness in need of a savior, and Christ is our hope. We are reminded of the majesty and power of Christ to save, just as a light dispels darkness. The apostle reminds us in verse 16 that this testimony is trustworthy. "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of His majesty." In contrast to the prophets of the world who craft cunning, deceptive tales, the apostles saw the Truth first hand and were speaking what they had seen and heard and knew to be truth. Therefore, we can have confidence in this; Christ is the one who was promised. He is our Messiah, the hope of glory.

What about you this advent season? Are you in darkness in need of a savior? Are you looking for hope, for meaning, for purpose, for salvation? Our Heavenly Father has not left us without hope, Christ has come. Perhaps you find yourself far from where you once were like a cloudy night on the ranch where the darkness is thick and overwhelming. Fear not, there is hope, Christ is near.

May we all find our hearts resonating with the heart of the Father who when He bestowed glory and honor on Christ, declared, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." Let us not be like the rich man and his brothers in Luke 21 who would not listen to Moses and the prophets and ended up dying without hope. Rather, let us "pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (1 Peter 1:19), and find ourselves among the Saints who live in joyful worship of Christ our savior, the Light of the World!

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we have been eyewitnesses to his majesty.
So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

— 2 Peter 1:16, 19–21

"Each of us can start now, in our own lives, by strengthening our connections and relationships. Our individual relationships are an untapped resource—source of healing hiding in plain sight. They can help us live healthier, more productive, and more fulfilled lives. Answer that phone call from a friend. Make time to share a meal. Listen without the distraction of your phone. Perform an act of service. Express yourself authentically. The keys to human connection are simple, but extraordinarily powerful."
—The former Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy

What does the law have to do with happiness? How do we walk in the law of the Lord? Does fame, family, money or profession offer happiness? Does rule-following generate happiness? Do Advent and Christmas? If none of these bring happiness, what does?

The author of Psalm 119 was adamant that to find happiness we need to follow the law, observe statutes and meditate on precepts. The psalmist knew that the law provided a framework or a set of boundaries which might guide us to find a happy life. Did the psalmist really think we could achieve those ideals? When we try to be perfect and instruct others to do the same we are setting ourselves up for frustration. Suppose the psalm was leading us to discuss necessary supplements to the law. The message of the laws must be balanced by messages of loving kindness, of grace and of connection to each other and ourselves.

I play the drums. Boundaries are set by the music, but there is freedom within the boundaries. I can vary the accents, tone, tempo and volume among other things to bring life to my musical part. The musical limits are necessary and offer order instead of chaos. Without those boundaries, we'd be listening to clamor. As a corollary, mechanical adherence to drumbeats can be monotonous, irritating and lifeless. So, I need both the boundaries and the freedom if I want to enjoy playing or listening.

As a physician, I sometimes witnessed terrible consequences from patients or their families believing in a legalistic version of the scriptures. Some of these patients blamed themselves for their cancer. I have heard folks in this camp state, "God will not give me more than I can handle," or "It's God's will." My heart broke when I heard someone share this belief system. I would quietly offer that illness happened and often the cause was a mystery. Sure, some lifestyle choices such as smoking put them at risk, but God wasn't punishing them. Their feeling of deserving punishment denied the basic message of the good news, grace and loving kindness of a loving God.

Advent is a reminder that the way to happiness or a fulfilled life is not through attempting rigid adherence to Biblical law. Advent delivers a message through the birth and life of Jesus that a happy life is built by loving kindness and acceptance of ourselves and others.

To paraphrase the psalmist, "Happy are those who walk in the ways of keeping social connections, sharing of meals, extending trust, being authentic, and giving to others."

Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord.
Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong
but walk in his ways.

— Psalm 119:1–3

Matthew 25:31–46
Chet Knapp

Week One · Day Five
Thursday, December 3

As I read this passage from Matthew, I am convicted of my own hardness of heart as it relates to encounters with those less fortunate in our community. Since coming to Macon, I have become somewhat inured by the frequency of encounters with the homeless or indigent, so much so that I will often imagine that I know how the few dollars exchanged will be ill-spent, thus relieving me of the guilt of passing by the petitioner without responding to the evident need. I may even pat myself on the back as I pass for a self-perceived shrewdness or gift of discernment ("you're not fooling me I know how this will be spent", I might mumble under my breath) but reflecting on it in light of this parable, I don't recall shrewdness being listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In fact, I feel like I may be in jeopardy of being numbered among the goats (and I don't think our Lord was using goat as an acronym as is common in today's vernacular).

Confronted by scripture in other places with the notion that faith without works is dead (See James chapter 2), I have often written it off as the musings of a zealot, after all doesn't Paul say in Romans 4, and Galatians 3 that righteousness is credited solely on the basis of faith? And don't I write checks to these organizations like Christ Church whose outreach ministries are supposed to be dealing with these issues? Shouldn't that be credit enough for me? Somehow, I can't get around the idea that the point that Christ was making was to highlight the importance of our heart condition as demonstrated in the smallest act of kindness even in the briefest of encounters. "When you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me", seems like the Lord's way of challenging us to see the image of God in every person we encounter, especially the least fortunate.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.... Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

— Matthew 25:31–33, 41–46

Week One · Day Six
Friday, December 5

Matthew 22:1–14
Nancy White

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son."

I love wedding celebrations, and when invited, I go if at all possible. Weddings in recent years of my nieces and nephews have carried me to Chilliwack, Canada; Perth, Scotland; Boston, Massachusetts; and Springfield, Missouri. Last November I flew to Little Rock, Arkansas for the wedding of our next-door neighbors' son. Each wedding pulsed with joy and generosity. Guests arrived dressed in their finest, flowers perfumed the air, tables overflowed with food, and music kept us on our feet until midnight. And, these Western wedding celebrations pale in comparison to those I grew up attending in Pakistan, which usually last a week!

Why do weddings stir such gladness? Because at their heart, they celebrate something universal and enduring—love. Love binds families, spans centuries, and unites cultures. No wonder Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet. He wanted us to picture love as a feast—abundant, overflowing, shared.

During Advent, we wait for Christ's coming with the expectancy of wedding guests preparing for the feast. We ready ourselves not only with joy but with commitment and generosity. Love is not sentiment alone. It takes shape in action—loving God with heart, soul, and mind, and loving neighbor as self, as Jesus taught during his human life. God entered into our humanity, including our suffering, through the birth of his son Jesus, the union of human and divine. Jesus' life revealed God's true nature, which is love, mercy and compassion. This is indeed a banquet at which all God's children around the globe can rejoice, feast and celebrate.

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

— Matthew 22:1-10

Matthew 22:15–22
Linda Horne

Week One · Day Seven
Saturday, December 6

My Grandfather used to say, "Two things are certain in life, death and taxes." I am certain many have heard this before. In this passage, Matthew tells how Jesus addressed paying taxes after being questioned by those around him asking Jesus "...is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" Matthew tells us that the Pharisees and the Herodians were trying to trick and trap Jesus with their question, but he did not fall for their trap. Instead, He was ready when they questioned Him and gave an answer that both surprised and amazed them. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's". Jesus turned the table on them. Paying taxes was a difficult subject even in Jesus's time. And the group tried to use that to trap Jesus in his answer,

I, like many of you, I am sure, do not like tax time or any other time I must pay taxes. Paying taxes has never been a favorite task of citizens even during Jesus's time. Jesus addressed this responsibility of citizens by telling the group to"give to Caesar what is Caesar's". Being a responsible citizen requires this of us.

In his answer, Jesus also addressed the other issue the Pharisees and Herodians were posing and that was "What is given to God?" In his answer he told the group "...and to God, what is God's." Most important of all is the fact that we are first and foremost a citizen of God's Kingdom. Jesus in his answer is telling us to accept the responsibilities of being a citizen where we live but to remember that our ultimate allegiance belongs to God and that we owe all that we are and have to Him. After all, God created us. God gives us talents and blessings. So many times, we may not use the talents God has given us to give back to Him. Whether it is in supporting the church or serving those around us, the giving of ourselves does not take much. We may not have much (money, material things) to give but we can learn from the little drummer boy in the song we sing at Christmas. While it may not be a true story, there is much we can take from the verses. The Little Drummer Boy did not have much (I am a poor boy too) but he gave to the little Baby what he had, a song played on his drum. We are asked to give what we have to God. We are members of His kingdom, and we have been truly blessed. Even on Tax Day.

God gave us His Son. As we enter this season of Advent may we remember that wonderful gift and that we are a member of His Kingdom. May Christmas remind us of that song about the little baby in the manger and the drummer boy who came to see him, bringing the only things he had, a drum and a song. May we be encouraged as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, to give to God all that we have, however small it may seem, to honor and serve Him!

"...then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum."

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him...saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this and whose title?" They answered, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

— Matthew 22:15–21

Week Two · Day One
Sunday, December 7

Matthew 3:1–12
Chris Blake

I am always struck how on the surface this reading seems out of place in the season of Advent. Even its opening, "in those days", refers not to those days of Mary and Elizabeth awaiting their divinely sent newborn children, or the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem. The author of the gospel of Matthew is talking about those days of the start of Jesus' ministry as an adult. The shepherds in the fields (or Magi in Matthew) and the Christ born in the squalor of a farm shed are a distant memory. Of course, what Matthew is doing is making us realize that Advent not only anticipates God Incarnate in human flesh as a baby, but it anticipates that God Incarnate is coming to change us, our relationships to Him and to each other, and to the Universe forever more.

John, whom Jesus tells us "Of those born of women no one is greater than John", is the divinely appointed herald of God's New Age. And what a disarming and anxiety-raising figure is John. No "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild" here. This is a messenger from God in the same disquieting manner as Elijah and Isaiah. There is, in truth, God's judgment on history going on here, and nothing ever will be the same now that God Incarnate has become born into a world human vulnerability, weakness, dependency and death, and is now about to unleash the greatest news that humankind has ever received.

But even the best news can fall on deaf ears. For John knows that the coming of the Messiah needs honest recognition and the desire to turn away from the Old Age that is characterized by sin, despair and death. And that turning away from that requires us turning toward God in total reliance, with a spirit of repentance and acceptance of God's sovereignty. And that is a fearful thing to do. It's as fearful as the young Mary was when the Angel told her of her destiny, including a future broken heart, in becoming the Mother of God. It's as fearful as the shepherds in the fields who are told of "Glad Tidings" and are rooted to the spot in mortification of what God is showing them. And John wants to know that before the mercy, reconciliation and love that is inaugurated for all in God Incarnate, first the Old Age must be judged and rejected. For those hanging on to the imprisoned security of the Old Age, the consequences are severe. It's not just the pious Pharisees and Sadducees who are stuck in the Old Age, while claiming to see God in front of them. I am fearful to admit that I am also part of that "brood of vipers" that wants it both ways, no, all ways. God sent John, like Elijah and Isaiah, to make straight the path of the Lord, and he did not tell John to do it politely or without knocking down a few sacred spaces to achieve it.

Advent is the moment a New Age of God's Age is given to humankind. It redeems us and the whole of creation in unending love of such abundance that it cannot be fully appreciated in this life, even as the Kingdom of God is indeed now at hand. But it will take us to hear some difficult truths about what is wrong with our Old Age before the utter joy of God's New Age envelops us for eternity.

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.' "

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

— Matthew 3:1–4

Revelation 1:1–7
Tim Hoskins

Week Two · Day Two
Monday, December 8

Advent is a theologically rich and complex time of the year because of its double focus: the yearning of the Jewish people for the Messiah expressed by the Old Testament prophets from the time of the Babylonian Exile down to the birth of Jesus and the Church's yearning for his return. These two points in time, one in the past and one in the future, situate us in the timeline of Salvation History. The Kingdom of God, which the Old Testament prophets foresaw, was established by Jesus when he came in the 1st century and its establishment will be completed when he comes again.

For this reason, it is appropriate that Advent is the season that begins the Church's year. It is the season that best reminds us what our mission is: to do our part in the establishment of that kingdom. This helps us make sense of verse 3 where John says: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of the prophecy...for the time is near." How can the time be near when this book was written in the days of ancient Rome? Because the time, the time of the establishment of God's Kingdom, is now. It is ongoing. And we are born into this time to do our part in building it.

This realization also helps us understand some of the darker imagery of the season. In verse 7, John writes:

"Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."

I think to understand this wailing, we must realize that Jesus' coming isn't something that should be frightening to us, but it is, like the coming of any new order, something unwelcome to those who benefit from being on the top of the current order. As comfortable, 21st century Americans, all this talk of judgment seems dark and threatening and out of step with the joyful tenor of the season, but, for those living in fear and poverty and oppression, the coming of the Judge is joyful. It is Salvation.

So, at the start of this new year, let's take a moment to remember our purpose. To be in the world, but not of it. Not to be comfortable denizens of the present age, but rather those who are working to build the new age of God's perfect Kingdom.

Blessed is the one who reads the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
John to the seven churches that are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.
So it is to be. Amen.

— Revelation 1:2–7

Week Two · Day Three
Tuesday, December 9

Revelation 1:8–16
Aaron Svare

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

— Revelation 1:8

As Advent begins, we often focus on the gentle image of the Christ child in a manger. But Revelation 1:8–16 lifts the veil on that same Christ, now glorified, radiant, and reigning. Here, John receives a vision not of a baby in swaddling clothes, but of the risen Jesus—eyes like blazing fire, voice like rushing waters, face shining like the sun.

This is the Christ we await in Advent: not only the one who came in humility, but the one who is to come in glory. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. His presence transcends time—He was, He is, and He is coming again.

John's reaction is telling: he falls at Jesus' feet "as though dead." Yet Jesus lays His hand on him and says, "Do not be afraid." In this season of waiting, we are reminded that the One we await is both majestic and merciful. He holds the keys of death and Hades, and yet He reaches out to comfort us.

As we light the first candle of Advent, let us lift our eyes beyond the manger to the throne. Let us prepare not only to celebrate Christ's first coming, but to live in readiness for His return. The King is coming—not in silence, but in splendor.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Alpha and Omega, in this season of Advent, awaken our hearts to Your majesty. Help us to live in holy anticipation, not only remembering Your birth, but longing for Your return. May we, like John, fall in awe before You—and rise with courage, knowing You hold all things in Your hands. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.
I, John, your brother who share with you the persecution and the kingdom and the endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."
Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire; his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

— Revelation 1:8–16

Revelation 1:17—2:7
Ginny Lane Sheridan

Week Two · Day Four
Wednesday, December 10

Is our heart positioned to receive the word of the Lord, despite our circumstances? In this passage, God holds us accountable for the order in which we are living our lives, pointing to a question that has echoed through my heart many times this year. As I've tried to navigate difficult circumstances through my own humanness—exhausting the same old roads that always lead me back to emptiness—I've felt this gentle whisper rise within me: Am I living in alignment as a child of God?

John's circumstances in Revelation 1 mirror this common human experience so well. Even as a faithful disciple, he finds himself overwhelmed, frightened, and exiled on the island of Patmos. Whether we're walking through difficult seasons alone or surrounded by others, our circumstances can feel just as isolating—pulling us into survival mode and shifting our eyes from how big our God is to how heavy our burdens feel. And yet, Jesus meets John in this exact place, not with condemnation but with compassion. He places His hand on him and says, "Do not be afraid," a moment that reorients everything. Christ reminds John who He truly is—the First and the Last, the Living One—and in doing so restores John's identity and perspective, calling him to give the power back to God rather than to his circumstances. Through His sacred Word, Jesus brings richness into the very places where John feels a deficit. He does the same for us when life feels out of order, which is often not as picturesque as the Advent season is made to appear.

While Advent today is wrapped in glowing fires, sparkling lights, and effortless joy, December rarely arrives without its own deficits—spiritual, emotional, financial, or simply the fatigue of living at a relentless pace. Starting a new business this year has brought moments of deep loneliness and uncertainty for me as well. There have been days when I, too, have felt like John on his island of Patmos—isolated, unsure, surviving rather than thriving. And yet, it has been in this very place—stripped of familiar securities—that God has been the most intimate with me. When the noise quiets, His voice becomes clearer. What felt like isolation has become an invitation to depend on Him in a deeper way, to remember my first love, and to trust that relationship with Him—not effort—is what sustains me.

The invitation of Advent is the same: remember where your love began, repent where striving has taken over, and return to Him. Even in seasons that feel like Patmos, Christ draws near. He reorders our chaos with His peace and invites us to walk in love again.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for this Advent season.

Reorder our hearts and give us a desire to seek Your Word, receiving the richness of Your presence where we feel a deficit. Bless us with a kingdom perspective rather than the distractions around us, so we may walk in alignment with You.

Restore our love for You in every storm and season of uncertainty. Remind us what a gift it is to be in relationship with You, and teach us to grow in humble trust of Your sovereign ways.

Renew our trust when we are tempted to return to old roads. Meet us in the quiet places and lead us boldly in the path of peace and righteousness, trusting You wholly with our lives. Amen.

"I know your works, your toil and your endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. "

— Revelation 2:1–3

Week Two · Day Five
Thursday, December 11

Psalm 37:1-9
Melody Blake

This last summer we were swimming at the pool with our grandchildren. At one point I found myself alone in the pool with two non-swimmers - a two year old and four year old. As one jumped in and started to sink, I let go of the other one and she went under too. No harm was done as I caught them both immediately, but I did have two unhappy little girls on my hands! The next day I was trying to coax the two year old back in the pool with me and she said to me, "Gigi, don't swallow me again." I told her I promised I wouldn't swallow her and she took a deep breath, looked me in the eye and said, "Ok, I trust you."

That is how I feel sometimes about God. The world is swallowing me up and you are asking me to get back into the pool again! But the psalmist reminds us, "Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong, for like the grass they will soon wither and like green plants they will soon die away" Instead, we are told, "Trust in the Lord."

Oh so easy to say, trust in the Lord, but sometimes so difficult to do. Sometimes we have to take a deep breath, look God right in the eye, and remind ourselves that we trust Him. But the psalmist gives us some ideas of how to do that too. Verse 4 tells us to "Take delight in him," verse 5 tells us to "Commit your way to him" and verse 7 tells us to "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him."

So how do we remind ourselves He is trustworthy? First we can remind ourselves of all the times He has been trustworthy in the past. Take delight today in a memory when you were sustained by God through a rocky time. Take delight today in a time when your soul was in desperate need of being refreshed and you saw a beautiful sunset, or watched an eagle soar or heard a baby laugh, or however God refreshed you. Take delight that the God of the universe is here with us and amongst us.

Second, we can remind yourself that we committed "our way" to God. As Christians, we gave up some rights when we agreed to live in God's covenant love. God is sometimes hard to understand, but we can remind ourselves that His ways are not our ways. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9. Take comfort in the fact that we don't have to figure it all out, but like a small child we can trust in the one who has it all figured out.

And finally, "Be still." Find some time today to quiet your soul and be still. It is in the still quiet voice that the Lord most commonly speaks. And when we are still, we can start to hear the heartbeat of love surrounding us, comforting us and reminding us, He always has been and always will be trustworthy...even when it feels like we are being swallowed up.

Trust in the Lord and do good;
live in the land and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

— Psalm 37:3–6

Psalm 31:1–8
Bonita Braun

Week Two · Day six
Friday, December 12

The first time I read Psalm 31, in preparation to write a reflection for this year's Advent Booklet it felt like a lament. The feeling probably came from my state of mind in September! I read and reread the psalm several times. I asked myself what words, phrases, verses became the most meaningful to me. I share those words now with you and some thoughts. I share in the hope they will also enable your reflections.

Certain words and phrases repeatedly stood out to me. When I am most vulnerable, my prayer is, verse 1 "I seek refuge," in God. It is a quick one sentence no matter where I am.

In verse 2. "Incline your ear to me." I am more likely to say 'hear me Lord/God' or even yell the words. And God is always there without reproach

Verse 3 I know God is "my fortress," and God knows the "net that is hidden" (Vs. 4) for us as individuals and as groups. Always we can come to Him in Faith.

The most stunning verse in these eight is Verse 5, "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God." Jesus prayed this prayer on the cross. When I am weary, wary, I realize I often pray a similar prayer. It is with this verse I realize the trust the Jesus Story teaches me/us. I/we carry, sometimes unconsciously scripture in our being. As we prepare to celebrate his birth verse five is a wonderful reminder of the gift of Christmas.

Then there is Verse 8 starting at Verse 7 "You have taken heed of my adversities...set my feet in a broad place." Our God does not confine us in small places. Our feet are not confined nor our minds! The BCP translation uses "open" instead broad place in Verse 8.

Suggestion: take time to ponder our loving God in these eight verses and give thanks and praise.

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.
You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me;
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.
— Psalm 31:1–5

Week Two · Day Seven
Saturday, December 13

Psalm 30
Lutricia Richardson

This psalm as scholars say was written by David, perhaps for the dedication of his palace or it could have been prophetically written for the dedication of the temple that David prepared for, but Solomon built. However, it is finally stated that this psalm has been written for the dedication of David's palace. Here, David gives thanks to God for giving him victory over his enemies. It is always right in everything to give thanks unto God. David, had a heart for God and when he did not that which is right in the sight of the Lord, he repented and asked God for forgiveness. He remembered to praise God.

During this season of Advent because of our situation we may find ourselves in a place of Complacency or doubt. Complacency causes one to feel uncritical satisfaction with oneself or one's achievements. Complacency will allow us to do the ritual or traditional, get the special ornaments out, attend the Christmas service, and support the Angel tree. However, when we can acknowledge/recognize our situation, and look beyond the situation to God, Jesus his Son and the Holy Spirit it will give us joy in the morning. And we will praise God for everything, for healing, for preservation of life, for the ability to praise him with our lips and demonstrate him with our lives. As believers in this world we must demonstrate the love and graciousness of God and go beyond the ritual by giving and sharing more of the greatness of the gift of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.
Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

— Psalm 30:1–5, 11–12

Isaiah 35:1–10
Christine Hoskins

Week Three · Day One
Sunday, December 14

"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing."

Guam is a US territory, a tropical island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Its terrain is mountainous but its lush jungle is about as different from the deserts of Israel as you can get.

In 1963 I was three, almost four, years old. My father was in the US Navy and he got orders to the naval communications station on the island of Guam. We left Atlanta in mid-December and traveled by train all the way across the country to San Francisco, a journey that took most of a week. Then we flew from San Francisco to Guam, stopping one time on Wake Island to refuel. We landed on Guam late in the evening on Christmas Eve.

All the way across the country my brother and I kept asking, "How will Santa find us? How will he know where we are?" Our mother kept reassuring us that Santa would know how to find us. I didn't learn until years later that she hand-carried our Christmas gifts in her suitcase half way around the world.

The Navy had a house in base housing set aside for us. The house came with furniture, pots and pans, and other basic household items, but the bulk of our clothing, books, toys, and personal goods including all our Christmas decorations, would be coming later by ship.

In the military, when someone gets orders to a new place a sponsor is assigned to them. The sponsor is usually someone from the same unit who can help arrange housing, show the new family around the base, introduce them to their new neighbors, and generally help them get settled. This was especially useful in the pre-internet days when mail could take weeks to go back and forth and international phone calls were prohibitively expensive.

Dad's sponsor was one of our new neighbors. He, his wife and their children lived in a house right next to ours in the Navy housing area. When he told the other neighbors that a family with little children would be arriving on Christmas Eve they got together and made a plan. They chipped in and bought a Christmas tree. Then they contributed from their personal family Christmas decorations to decorate the tree. Finally, knowing that the base commissary would be closed on Christmas Day, they filled the fridge with food, including a ham and pies and other food for a festive Christmas dinner.

My brother and I woke up on Christmas morning to a decorated tree, wrapped gifts, and food for a holiday meal. Strangers had banded together to make a merry Christmas for two exhausted parents and two children who didn't know that Santa never needed to find them. He was already there waiting.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and shouting.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

— Isaiah 35:1–2

Week Three · Day Two
Monday, December 15

Psalm 41:8–13
Jed Hill

Psalm 41:8–13 gives voice to one of the deepest human wounds: betrayal. The psalmist is not simply surrounded by enemies; he is wounded by someone who once shared his table and his trust. Few pains cut more sharply than betrayal by a friend. This passage echoes forward into the New Testament as a foreshadowing of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, reminding us that even the Messiah tasted the bitterness of abandoned trust.

Yet the psalm does not leave us in the shadow of hurt. David turns his eyes from the malicious rumors of others to the steadfastness of God. "May you have mercy on me, Lord," he pleads. It is not vindictiveness he seeks, but restoration—raise me up. When human words aim to bury him, God's word is the one that lifts.

Notice the turning point: "I know that you are pleased with me." The psalmist's confidence does not come from the loyalty of others but from the favor of God. When God is for him, the schemes of others cannot stand. This becomes a powerful reminder for anyone feeling misunderstood, falsely accused, or left alone: God's pleasure, not people's approval, becomes the anchor of your stability.

David concludes with a declaration of praise, even before circumstances fully change. Worship becomes the final word, not betrayal. Pain does not silence his voice; it sharpens it. By the end of the psalm, the focus is no longer on enemies or friends who failed him, but on the God whose faithfulness spans eternity.

Where have you experienced betrayal or disappointment? Bring those wounds before God today. He sees, He knows, and He upholds you. Trust that He will raise you up, not merely to stand again, but to stand in His presence forever. Let your final word, like David's, be praise.

They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.
Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.
But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.
By this I know that you are pleased with me:
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity
and set me in your presence forever.
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

— Psalm 41:8–13

Psalm 45
Charlie Weigle

Week Three · Day Three
Tuesday, December 16

The Bible, read as a whole, is a great romantic comedy. Every romantic comedy has essentially the same structure. The story begins with a pair of lovers, who we all know are meant to be together. But the course of true love never does run smooth. The lovers are separated by a series of misadventures, miscommunications, and misunderstandings. An "inappropriate suitor" appears, someone who seems appealing and attractive to one of the lovers but is thoroughly inappropriate, even dangerous. At the climax of the story, one or both of the lovers risk falling into ruin. Fortunately, this is comedy, not tragedy. In the end, circumstances contrive to bring about that most improbable of all things in this vast universe – a happy ending. Every romantic comedy begins with a separation and ends with a wedding.

Psalm 45 is a wedding song, for a royal wedding that unites a mighty prince, "fairer than the children of men," and a noble princess, "all glorious within, her clothing of wrought gold." In one sense, it is a song for every wedding, because every wedding is a royal wedding, every bride on her wedding day a beautiful princess and every groom a handsome prince. When the bride and groom come together in love their love multiplies, and they make their children princes in all the earth.

More significantly, this Psalm is a song for a particular wedding, the wedding that comes at the end

of the book, when a voice like thunder comes out of the throne of God saying, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The scattered and straying people of God will come together at last to become the bride of Christ.

Between the separation at the beginning of the book and the wedding at the end, there is much sorrow and mortal danger. The essence of our faith is to believe through it all in that happy ending, to know that the God who set this story in motion is a good god, and loves what he has created. What began in separation will end in love.

"I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever."

Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.
Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;
you love righteousness and hate wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;
your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;
daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

— Psalm 45:6–9

"It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."

— Matthew 24:46 NIV

I don't know about you, but I sometimes get overwhelmed by all that is going on in the world. Watching the news has become a pastime that takes some good resilience skills. And my prayers go out to anyone who is addicted to doom scrolling. Every day there is something new to be worried about and it feels chaotic and unpredictable—not particularly good feelings. I know my tendency is to want to retreat from the chaos—bury my head in the sand, pick up a new hobby and go on my merry way, blissfully ignorant. While that might be self-protective, Matthew 24 suggests an alternative.

The 24th chapter of Matthew has garnered a lot of commentary over the years. Commentaries suggest that the chapter is describing Jesus's prophecy to his disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the signs of the end of the age. While I am not suggesting we are at the "end of the age", I do think the list of things mentioned in Matthew 24 sound familiar...wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, false prophets, people hating each other.

So that brings us to today's passage: Jesus' advice on how to live during turbulent times. He asks, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?" Interesting that Jesus' question is who is taking care of the servants? Who is making sure they get food? But of course, Jesus always is for the poor, the disadvantaged and the outcast.

It seems to me, Jesus is saying to us today, go do some good. Take care of those who have been put into your care. Keep an eye out for those who are suffering that are in your sphere of influence. We might not be able to directly help the people of Gaza or Israel, but we can help those we come into contact with in Macon, Georgia. We might not be able to solve immigration, but we can do some good locally, for those who live near us and among us. Jesus says it will be good for us if he finds us doing so when he returns.

So let's not become weary in doing good (Galatians 6:9) but instead let's keep loving those around us, caring for those we can care for, and this advent season, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). Don't give up or give into the darkness that tries to overwhelm and consume us, instead we will continue "doing so"—loving, caring, giving—and spreading the advent light.

"Who, then, is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that wicked slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

— Matthew 24:45–51

Matthew 25:1–13
David Cline

Week Three · Day Five
Thursday, December 18

This parable of Jesus tends to be glossed over because we believe we know what Jesus means. However, what this passage says to me is that we should always be ready. Not in the sense of preparing for the end times and looking towards the end, as some traditions do, but rather be ready for the return of the Lord; and be a lamp with full oil for those who are in darkness. As our memorial acclamation states "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again", we must hold fast to our faith and keep our oil stock high.

We are blessed to have a Church calendar of seasons, which invites us to inwardly reflect and digest the life of Christ and His Earthly ministry in our daily Christian walk. This parable of the ten bridesmaids (or virgins in some translations), showcases a pivotal role in what faith means and why it should be kept strong. The five wise bridesmaids who went out into the night took oil flasks with them to greet the bridegroom. Since they brought extra oil, they were able to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding party. The foolish five however, who failed to take extra oil were forced to go to the market to purchase more oil, and in turn, were excluded from the wedding party.

What this passage warns us about is commoditization and the cost of an immature faith. Some believe that if we operate under a quid pro quo agreement with God, then He will find favor in our fruits and works. This elementary concept of a relationship is dangerous when we go out with our lamps into the night to spread the light of Christ in the world. As a result of our commoditization and immaturity of faith, we become the five foolish bridesmaids who failed to take extra oil.

What Jesus is telling us in this parable is that we should be sober, watchful, and most importantly, mature in our faith. Sometimes we allow our lamps to run out, and sometimes in our lack of discernment and excitement, we forget to carry oil. So in this season of preparedness and quiet fasting with family, let us remember and pray for those that don't have any oil in their lamps, and for those that wish to have a lamp but don't have one due to circumstance or are surrounded by darkness.

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later the other young women came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

— Matthew 25:1–13

Week Three · Day Six
Friday, December 19

Psalm 40:1–13
Ellen Murphey

In the midst of a broken and unstable world, there is still great love, joy and abundance.

These verses in Psalm 40 teach us to trust in God and He will preserve us. This is the only way to true peace and freedom. I write this as my husband and I prepare to move from our home of many wonderful years to an apartment at Carlyle Place.

I spent my last Sunday afternoon there in our backyard wandering through the woods thanking God and appreciating all the beauty around me. I was overcome with emotions of loss and sadness and it felt good to cry and release those feelings. Lots of changes are coming for me and my family and I know with God's help we will be supported.

In preparing for a move, going through a lifetime of pictures, mementos, and other items that evoke feelings, it is not easy to let go. But isn't our purpose to keep our eyes on God and the unseen? Trusting in Him is the only way!

I am learning that instead of spiraling down and focusing on all that is changing , we can open our hearts and look for the good and be grateful. When I think of the myriad of circumstances we all try to resist, I've discovered there is a vital lesson to be learned. We need to accept what is and lean into our faith! I am doing that now more than ever and it has brought me stability, hope and peace.

My favorite reading from the Book of Common Prayer comes from Isaiah 26:3; 30:15

"Oh God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength."

That is my mantra. Peace be with you!

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the Lord.
Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me.

— Psalm 40:1–3, 13

Matthew 25:31–46
Sandy Kendall & Louise Rowland

Week Three · Day Seven
Saturday, December 20

Do you find it easy to read Bible verses but harder to put them into action? Maybe we all have good intentions but" life gets in the way"? Might this have been the difference between the goats and the sheep??? To first offer an interpretation of the "Sheep", His true followers, would be they both heard and implemented His word in all they did by following the second commandment: "love one another". The "Sheep" offered goodness to all where no distinction was made by poor, rich, farmer, slave, etc. On the other hand, the "Goats" either didn't hear or didn't practice the message of love that He offered. I believe we all want to be "sheep", but as noted earlier "life gets in the way". Some may find that work deadlines blind us to others in need, possibly family issues and/or obligations make us focus only on our lives, or maybe the Christmas rush with decorating, purchasing, etc. can prevent us from seeing the need and intervening on behalf of others. Whatever we have in our busy lives, may we all strive to feel and implement His love to all friends, family, and strangers we encounter.

May this simple view find a place in your heart this Advent season as we await His coming!. –Sandy

You gave me food and drink and welcomed me and clothed me and visited me in prison. Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.

These paraphrased verses from Matthew are a jolting reminder of who we are as Christ's own and what is expected of us as Christians. We can feed the hungry at the weekend lunch program and help clothe the poor with donations to clothing banks, but I believe Jesus's message is much more than that. We encounter people in need of something, be it material things or spiritual healing, or even just a friendly gesture, every time we walk out of our doors. He tells us what our priorities should be. Love one another as I have loved you. He stretched out his arms upon the cross to make sure all included in His love. And if we are to imitate His love, then we must strive to love all.

I already know what His answer will be when I ask Him the questions: when did I not feed you or clothe you or visit you....I know the answer because I have passed Him by many, many times without a thought of giving Him a helping hand. But through His grace, he still loves a sinner like me.

In this hopeful, expectant season of Advent, Lord, please open our eyes to see you in all of your children. Amen. –Louise

"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

— Matthew 25:34–40

Week Four · Day One
Sunday, December 21

Matthew 1:18–25
Tim Hoskins

Advent is a season of anticipation. We (especially the younger ones among us) anticipate the Christmas morning that comes at the end of these four weeks, with its presents and treats and family gatherings. We remember in our liturgy the Jewish people's centuries of anticipation for their deliverance and the coming of the Messiah. And we reflect on our own anticipation of the coming of Jesus and "the life of the world to come." And anticipation comes in two flavors: excitement and fear. Sometimes they are mixed together and sometimes one comes on the heels of the other.

Imagine how Joseph was feeling where Matthew picks up his story. The excitement of his upcoming marriage suddenly transforming into the fear that his betrothed has been unfaithful to him and that addressing it may lead to Mary being publicly disgraced or even put to death. And this is to say nothing of the fear and excitement of being visited by an angel!

As a righteous Jewish man, Joseph would have known the Scriptures. He would have been familiar with the prophets and the long awaited coming of the Messiah that his people look towards for their deliverance. But how would he have felt if he knew that he had been chosen to play a role in the Messiah's coming and how that role would play out? Fear at the prospect of the long journey to Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt to escape Herod's paranoid campaign, raising a son doomed to die a death of immense suffering? Or excited that the Messiah entrusted to him to raise was not coming to save Israel from captivity, but to save the whole world from their sins. That "God with us" means not only God showing us his favor, but his physical, incarnate presence among us.

As humans, we often try to live the next step ahead, constantly living out our hopes and fears for the future. In today's passage, Joseph offers a model to follow. God's plan will unfold in ways we can't imagine. Our job is to be ready when we are called and faithfully accept that the path he is leading us down will end better than we could expect.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

— Matthew 1:18–25

Isaiah 43:1–13
Chris Blake

Week Four · Day Two
Monday, December 22

The coming of the light in the darkness is a fitting theme for the season of Advent and the coming of Christmas, particularly evident in the longer nights in our northern hemisphere. This beautiful passage from Isaiah speaks directly to that experience of waiting on God to bring hope to a place and time when hope is lost. We even sing,"O Come, O Come, Emanuel, And Ransom Captive Israel". For the prophet Isaiah this is the late period during the Babylonian Exile, about 540 BCE, when two generations of Hebrews had already been held - and many had died - "captive" and away from their Promised Land, desperately awaiting their being ransomed and redeemed. As I write this, the people of Israel and Gaza wait in darkness for the release of hostages and prisoners, and the end of torment and suffering on a scale that is hard to understand. I pray that by the time of Advent, that wait is finally over.

For the people of God, in this case Isaiah, the message is clear. Even if our faithfulness to God is weak, fearful and pathetic—a mere mustard seed of faith—God remains steadfast to us. Like the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness", it is God's faith, not ours, that is the driving force for the redemption of mankind and the coming of God Incarnate to a broken, tragic, despairing world. God is in charge of this faithfulness, we are not. We only need trust in it.

And that does not mean we are without pain or fear or loss. Like the angel before Mary, we are told "Do Not Fear" even as our fear is absolute and our circumstances may be very bleak. We will indeed "pass through the waters" and experience the worst at times that life delivers, but we need to remember that "you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you", we can with our tiny faith know in confidence that the unending faith of the God of the Universe is toward his creation, and to each of us that are his children. If God knows when the sparrows fall, after all, we can be confident that his care and concern is unending toward us.

Isaiah was waiting—his own Advent—for the coming of redemption from Exile and for the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah knew that the love of God did not rely on himself or his people, but only on knowing that God loves us first. God has faith in his people, and his faithfulness is great, even as the rivers rise amongst us and the world's slings and arrows of outrageous fortune fall around us. Our faith comes second to God's, and that is why we can indeed trust in Advent and the coming of Emanuel, God With Us.

Isaiah ends this passage knowing that in God's good time this will indeed work out so very well for us - so abundantly, so redemptively for each of us and for all of us. Our transitory lives of tears and laughter are in the context of the Creator in whom we can have faith, because His faith in us—his creation—is beyond conditions and limits. Indeed, "Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" That assurance and certainty is the promise of Advent.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

— Isaiah 1b–3a

Week Four · Day Three
Tuesday, December 23

Luke 1:26–38
Sheri Pyles

Luke 1:26-38 relates to us today demonstrating many aspects about God's extraordinary power, His ability to use ordinary people, and the importance of faith and willingness to embrace His plan, even when it's overwhelming or confusing.

Mary was an ordinary and unlikely teenager from the small town of Nazareth. She hadn't done anything to earn God's grace—it was a gift given freely by God. It shows us that nothing is impossible for God that he calls people to serve Him through grace, and that even in moments of deep confusion, we can find comfort and strength in His promise and presence.

The angel's greeting to Mary, "Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God" is a message of grace and assurance for all of us. It shows that God chooses to reveal Himself and work through us, not because of our status, but out of His immense love and grace.

Mary's response, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," is a model of complete submission and faithfulness. It encourages us to be willing to serve God's plan, even when it involves uncertainty and a willingness to risk vulnerability for a greater purpose.

Like Mary, we may not understand God's plan. However, we can be certain of His grace and His desire to be with us every step of our journey. For a number of years, I have felt God had a calling or purpose for my life, but I didn't have the spiritual discernment of spiritual maturity to know what it was. Discerning God's will has been, and will continue to be, a process or journey that involve a combination of reading scripture, Bible study, prayer, wise counsel, and guidance from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has put mature believers in my life providing guidance and perspective. My willingness to serve has opened doors and opportunities that suited my skills and passions. God's timing is perfect and my journey has been one leap of faith at a time. By God's grace I can stand firmly planted in Him and not in the opinions or judgments of others. By submitting myself to whatever is God's plan has pushed me beyond my comfort level. Honestly, at times I resisted but the persistence and need were evidence that I needed to answer His call.

Faith isn't about knowing every detail, but about trusting the one who calls us. Every step or area of service has been an incredible blessing as many had assured me. Let my response be one of honor and humility as I recognize the incredible privileges of being a part of God's plan. I pray to continue to be blessed by God to be a blessing for others.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

— Luke 1:46–33

Luke 1:39–56
Phil Ballard

Week Four · Day Four
Wednesday, December 24

For me the Advent Season begins with Mary's Annunciation and ends at the empty tomb. God placed our Savior in Mary's womb for her to fulfill the promises the Father gives us. The Baby leaps for joy and Mary feels His holy kicking and blesses God for fulfilling his promises through her. Mary sings, her spirit rejoices, and her soul glorifies the Lord.

The one person who is constant throughout Jesus' life is His mother, Mary. She's there for His birth. She's there for the coming of the shepherds; the adulation of the Magi; and Jesus' growing into manhood. She witnesses many of the miracles and the growth of His ministry; His trial; His crucifixion; His burial in the stone tomb. As a mother, her child has fulfilled the glory promised when He began in her womb. He has humbled the mighty and raised up the weak. He rises from His death bed victorious!

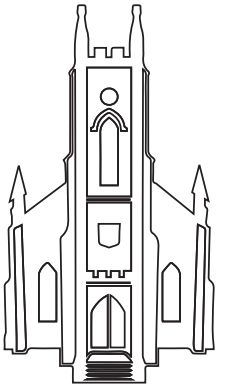
Mary was there for all these things. Mary knew. I have always felt Mary also knew of the Resurrection. She sensed that this baby was the fulfillment of the prophets and his destiny was to be our Savior. Mary believed deeply in her Son as all mothers do.

And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

— Luke 1:46–55

Thursday, December 25

Merry Christmas
From Christ Church



CHRIST
CHURCH
EPISCOPAL