

Welcome to **Waiting in Joyful Hope!** This is the Jesuit School of Theology's online daily prayer experience for Advent.

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 or other members 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 as 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, Advent is a time to know God's love for us in Christ more deeply and to respond more completely to this love through our lives.

At JST, we pay attention to the situation of our world and our communities as we study and minister to others. If the Spirit moves you, bring the very ordinary routines of daily life and what you read in the news into your own prayerful reflections. We face urgent and widespread concern for the future of our planet. We witness the profound divisions among neighbors and nations. *What is God trying to teach us at this moment?*

We make this Advent journey in supportive companionship. 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 through 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 generosity is the most important spiritual disposition for our prayer life. Generosity is 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 to God and to those on the pilgrim journey of our lives together.

Godspeed on the adventure ahead!

Alison M. Benders
Interim Dean
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

December 1

First Sunday of Advent

[Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44](#)

Welcome to Advent! This season begins a new year for the Church, a season shaped by the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the reign of God. We start in the dark—the liturgical color of this season is the deep purple of the night sky. This can be a season of intense busy-ness, too, as we prepare for Christmas, making plans for travel or holiday festivities. At JST students are working on final papers and projects, while faculty finish teaching and turn to grading. The days grow shorter, and we need to accomplish more and more. In one sense, Advent is a truly Ignatian season—if we are to contemplate at all, it will be in action.

Advent starts in the dark: today’s readings invite us to wake up. “[I]t is the hour now for you to awake from sleep,” Paul writes, and Jesus urges us to “stay awake!” For me, and perhaps for many of us, the challenge is not to stay awake but to focus. The mountain of tasks that compete for our attention can make it seem impossible to find time for discernment of the reign of God already breaking into our world, the myriad ways it is not yet, and our own role in the fulfillment of that “not yet.”

Isaiah invites us to climb a mountain—not an easy task!—so that God may “instruct us in [God’s] ways.” This climb is a pilgrimage, a formative journey of companions. This is the grace of a busy season: that we discern within our busy-ness the “already” and yearn for the “not yet,” and to pause now and then to breathe in deep the night sky. After all, “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,” as we ascend, not to the top of our mountain of tasks, but to a stable in Bethlehem.



Good and gracious God, help us to “go rejoicing” in this season of Advent, to become pilgrims together in a busy season. May we see your call in our work and your face in our companions. Help us to thirst for the “not yet” of your reign, and to breathe deep your grace that we may more and more strive for peace with all creation. We ask this through Jesus our brother, our most constant companion.

Lisa Fullam
Professor of Moral Theology

December 2

Monday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 122; Matthew 8:5-11

This year, I spent a week in Saskatoon, Canada where winters are harsh. Luckily, I arrived in April when spring was just beginning to emerge. While I was there, I visited a local group of artists who had spent the whole, unimaginably cold, winter painting. Then, when spring emerged they displayed their art. This story of painters in the heart of winter, splashing color on canvases, creating beauty when all around appears dead, stirs my imagination. In the heart of winter, what is my vision? When I can no longer see beauty around me, what are the colors I seek to paint with my life? When violence and division pervade, can I paint a bolder vision of peace? Proverbs tells us that without a vision, the people will perish.

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters someone who stokes up his vision for God's Kingdom. Jesus is so moved by the faith of the centurion that he proclaims his vision: "many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven." Is this not like a canvas painted in the heart of winter filled with bold color, proclaiming God's universal love when we are unable to see God's universal love?

Today, we remember the four women martyrs of El Salvador: Jean Donovan, Maura Clarke, Ita Ford and Dorothy Kazel. How did they hold onto a vision of God's love and Kingdom of peace in the middle of terror? May their lives inspire us and strengthen God's vision within us, so that in the darkness we may always have a vision for the people to flourish.



Loving God, in times of darkness stir our imagination and strengthen your vision within us, so we may boldly proclaim your Kingdom with our lives.

Sara Postlethwaite, V.D.M.F., S.T.L. '21

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72; Luke 10:21-24

“...for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.”

As a high school Religious Studies teacher with a graduate degree in theology, I can too easily fall prey to the notion that I—one of “the wise and the learned”—have answers that I need to reveal to my students. And yet, time and time again, my students remind me that they, in fact, have something to reveal to me.

Last week, at the end of our fall term, I invited my students to write down and share an image, idea, or concept from the class that they would carry with them going forward. These takeaways are written by young people who are not only racially and socioeconomically diverse, but also religiously diverse—some religious, some agnostic, many atheists. Perhaps God is working beyond the traditional categories of belief and religious identification. God reveals God’s self through each of these students, not only in spite of, but *because of* who they are and what they believe. I leave you, then, with what God has revealed through the “childlike.”

- “God is big, vast, and confusing. But, most of all, God is LOVE, in every way, shape, or form love comes in.”
- “Being thankful for more in life.”
- “When I become one with God—become more compassionate, merciful, and loving—I become one with myself.”
- “You can find God in anyone.”
- “God is found through compassion.”
- “Show love to everyone, especially the less fortunate.”
- “To put faith in the people around me and show them love.”
- “Strive for justice and practice kinship.”
- “I may not believe in God, but being open to the idea has proven to be quite enlightening and eye-opening.”
- “Be kind to all just as Jesus was with the people who are outcasts. Get to know them and maybe have a meal with them.”



Dear God, you are big, vast, and confusing. Help us to be thankful for more in life, to find you in anyone, to find you through compassion, to strive for justice and practice kinship, to put faith in the people around us and show them love, and to be kind to all just as Jesus was with people who are outcasts. Amen.

December 4

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 25:6-10; Psalm 23; Matthew 15:29-37

I.

Three weeks ago, I stood on a mountain in El Salvador.
It was *not* the mountain of which today's readings speak.

On that mountain, ferocious rains ruined a community's staple crops—the result of ecological degradation. On that mountain, unquenchable thirst and violence reign: sons and mothers are murdered in the streets, and fathers and daughters labor with no promise of pay.

On that mountain, I saw injustice.
There, no one feasts.
There are no baskets of bread or fish.

II.

This Advent, I hope for an end to the poverty and homelessness wrought by our breathless quest for economic domination; to patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia in church and society; to the ecological degradation that drives the technocratic paradigm; to the racism that haunts our world.

I'd imagine we all share that hope. But, Advent asks,

What are we doing about it?

Today's readings imagine a future that has not yet come. But to see Isaiah's images as signs of a *heavenly* future—somehow divorced from the injustices of El Salvador, Pine Ridge, and Silicon Valley—is to render the memory of Christ and the hope-against-hope of Advent an opiate for a self-satisfied, Bourgeois Christianity that thinks occasional works of charity are “enough.” As long as injustice remains, these images of feasting should *trouble us*.

III.

Advent calls us to ask different questions.

How am I acting to end injustice?

Do I have the courage to speak out against unjust social, ecclesial, and political structures that keep people from full participation in God's feast?

Isaiah's feast and the loaves and fishes symbolize that *there is enough to go around* when we live out our Christian responsibility to be prophets of hope who refuse to be satisfied until *all* are satisfied in body and in spirit. On that mountain in El Salvador, this *hope* abounds, driven by *faith* in the coming of Christ—born in Bethlehem, sure, but even more so borne *out* in the justice, peace, and love of God's reign, wherein all partake of the feast.



*God,
Creator and Lord,
trouble us.
Open our eyes to the suffering of our sisters and brothers
and the degradation of the ecosystems in which we live,
move,
and have our being.*

*Strengthen us, O God of life,
to be honest about our participation in structures of injustice—
especially when such honesty is the hardest thing—
so that our we may bring all people
to the feast of life, flourishing, and communion
for which you made all things.*

Amen.

Paul Schutz
Assistant Professor
Religious Studies Department, Santa Clara University

December 5

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118; Matthew 7:21, 24-27

I wonder if Mary pondered on the words of Isaiah during her time of waiting. “Trust in the LORD forever! For the LORD is an eternal Rock.”

There was so much Mary didn’t know and yet she trusted the words given her. Was her image of God one of an eternal Rock – to be trusted with everything forever?

I find much comfort in Isaiah’s words. Trusting – and waiting – with the God who is our Rock. Strength. The One on whom I build my house, my life.

During these Advent days, I often find myself needing to turn again and again to the God who is my Rock, trusting in the God Rock forever. The world waits for the coming of God into its dark brokenness. In my own brokenness and need for transformation, I open myself to this season of waiting and trusting.

I am invited to bring that promise of trust and rock-solidness to someone each day. So I begin with me, placing myself in the hands of a God who is my Rock. And as my healing and transformation slowly take place, I pray also for the brokenness of the world in which I live and ask how I can help bring God into a world waiting for the God who is our Rock.



*Loving God,
in this season of darkness and waiting,
I await your coming anew into my life
and into the life of this world.
Help me to continue to trust in you and to witness to that trust
to those I encounter this day.
Come, Jesus!*

Christine Ereiser, O.S.B.
JST Renewal Program participant

December 6

Friday of the First Week of Advent

IS 29:17-24; PS 27:1, 4, 13-14; MT 9:27-31

What are we blind to these days? In a time of futile, self-serving military and political alliances and widespread social injustices, Isaiah calls the people of Judah to see the work of God's hands in their midst which they cannot yet see. Aware of their personal struggle and social marginalization, Jesus invites the two blind men to see in a new way with the faith they already have.

Today, we can see so much injustice, violence, and brokenness in our world, in our church, in our communities, and in our own hearts. At times, we can feel surrounded and overwhelmed by it all, unable to see or feel anything else, unable to envision any other reality. But God sees differently. God sees the possibility of transformation already present in our broken world and in our broken selves. God is present and at work here, now, inviting us to see and participate.

This Advent, maybe God is inviting us to see in a new way, to see what we often fail to see. Maybe the invitation to us—caught up in our busy-ness, our work, our technology—is to look first of all at God, to see where God is present in our life and in the lives of those around us, to see how God's hands are at work in the midst of our world, our communities, and ourselves.

How can we set aside the time (and our devices!) each day just to sit with God and ask, "Show me your presence and your work. Help me to be with you and to join with you in your work."



Loving and ever-present God, open our hearts and our eyes so we may see you, be with you, and join with you in the work you are always doing in our midst and in our very selves.

Thomas Bambrick, S.J., M.Div. '21

December 7

Saturday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26; Psalm 147; Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5A, 6-8

“On the day the Lord binds up the wounds of his people . . .” These words of comfort spoken by the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel speak to us today in our Advent journey, in this time when we are called to awaken to the reign of God among and within us. What are the wounds that God is binding up in this season? They may be the inner wounds of our soul - painful memories, broken relationships, the grief over the loss of those we have loved. They may be the wounds in our Church - those of clerical sexual abuse, or of the sexism that endures in our Church structures. Or perhaps they are the wounds in our world - those of racism, or of widening inequalities between the rich and the poor, or those we have inflicted upon the earth in our greed and negligence.

The psalm echoes this image of the binding up of wounds and proclaims, “Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.” In this season of hope and vigilant waiting, how can we attune ourselves to the healing power of God?

The Gospel summons us forth to join with Jesus in the harvest. Like the original disciples, we too are also called “to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse lepers, to cast out demons.” How is the Spirit of God stirring within us in this Advent season, inviting us to the harvest of the reign of God? Are we being called to comfort an elderly person, to welcome a newcomer in our community, to come to the aid of the immigrant and the refugee, to advocate for climate justice? “Without cost you have received, without cost you are to give.” As God consoles and heals us, so also are we to go forth as laborers in this harvest to which Jesus summons us.



*God of Advent, you stir within us and within our world in this time of waiting. Help us to contemplate the signs of your presence and movement among us: “the streams of running water upon every high mountain, the rain that you give for the seed that is sown.” Help us to respond to the invitation to join in your harvest of hope, healing, compassion, love, and justice. In this holy season, let us prepare our hearts to receive you and join with you as disciples, binding up wounds in this day of the Lord.
AMEN.*

Paul Kircher, M.A. '93
Assistant Dean of Students

December 8

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

John the son of Zachariah, with his long hair, rough coat and taste for weird food, appeared like a first-century hippie. He was an outsider of the religious and political establishments. And yet, the Spirit thrust him from the desert to be a prophet and social critic. From his experience in the wilderness, John was to rattle Israel from their self-reliance to God's salvation plan available through the incoming Messiah. Sharpened in wisdom and words, John cuts his way through hypocrisy and sinfulness, and offers those listening the baptism of repentance. John called the crowd into waters of Jordan, the very place their ancestors had crossed over to the Promised Land after decades wandering in the dessert, for another transition, a change of heart.

John the Baptist shows up once a year during Advent to remind us of discipleship. The call to repentance, involves much more than saying sorry. "Metanoia" is less about mending the past and more on building the future. Conversion implies a radical change in attitudes and ways of life, a total transformation of priorities. Preparation for Christmas means renewing ourselves in various dimensions of our living.

Advent is a call to new hope and conversion to Christ – personally, socially, politically, and ecclesially. It means breaking down the walls that divide people. It is about welcoming others as Christ welcomed us (Romans 15:7). Concretely, it is about making peace with family members we have rejected, living patiently with an annoying neighbor, accepting the poor and immigrants into our neighborhood, giving voice to those who were victims of violence or abuse, respecting the dignity of those whose rights are trampled upon, and the list can go on. It also involves living more frugally and less wastefully so that we can conserve the precious resource of this earth.

May our hearts be changed and renewed so that we can make room for Christ when he comes.



God of Hope, just as You sent John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Jesus, help us also to straighten the path in our hearts. Show us the obstacles in our lives that block us from becoming who we should be. Fill our hearts with a deep and abiding peace. And help us share that peace with everyone we encounter, especially those who need it most. Amen.

Anh Tran, S.J.

Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology

December 9

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Psalm 98; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

Today's readings include the story of the Annunciation. As we enter the story, Angel Gabriel is about to make a startling and life-changing announcement: that Mary would be pregnant. Mary is visibly afraid, but the angel reassures her: "do not be afraid...you have found favor with God."

Despite the reassurance, Mary is hesitant about the proposal. She wonders aloud, "How can this be?" The angel urges her not to worry, for God will be in charge, and nothing is *impossible with God*. Convinced, Mary offers her consent: "*Let it be done according to God's will.*"

This story of a divine proposal and Mary's thought-through *consent* after asking for clarification is a parable of how women should be treated: with dignity and respect for their choices and agency. That we are made in God's image implies women's agency, their capacity to choose, and to say *yes or no* to proposals such as the one made by Gabriel. Commendably, Gabriel went out of his way to seek Mary's consent, carefully explaining God's proposal rather than just stating it. Mary's *yes* was important for Gabriel. Mary's *yes* becomes morally significant for us too as we evaluate all too frequent coercive actions that disregard or override women's choices and agency in many ways.

In saying the rosary (reciting *Hail Mary, full of grace* 52 times!), many, particularly women, recall Gabriel's life changing greeting that had far reaching consequences for Mary, even as they reflect on their own lives. As they recite these words over and over, do they perhaps resonate with Mary at this point? Have they been surprised by an unexpected pregnancy that caught them unawares and unprepared, making them afraid both for themselves and their unborn baby? Do they hear Angel Gabriel's words to Mary, *do not be afraid* (since) "*nothing is impossible with God,*" as their own?

Many women indeed resonate with the fear Mary felt as they worry for their children and themselves. However, they are also empowered and encouraged by the thought of a powerful God, ever ready to accompany them, as God did Mary, helping them navigate their respective, often perilous, journeys as women, mothers, and above all as persons of intrinsic worth, made as they are in *God's Image*.

With Mary, we too sing the *Magnificat*, a new song of appreciation for God's accompaniment and many interventions.

This Advent I join the multitudes, particularly women, who today will pray or chant the rosary and remember *Gabriel's life changing, encouraging, even empowering words...*



Hail Mary, Full Of Grace...Pray With Us....

As we wait in Joyful and resilient hope for a future in which God is truly, Emmanuel.

Teresia Hinga

Associate Professor, Santa Clara University

December 10

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 96; Matthew 18:12-14

What am I preparing for this Advent? Naturally, we are looking toward Christmas and have likely begun various preparations from scheduling visits to looking up recipes, exploring gift ideas, and the list goes on. In all this preparing, have I gotten more or less in touch with God, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day?

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”

The God we are preparing for desires to comfort us. God desires to comfort us in our limitations and failings. God desires to comfort us in our distractions and frustrations. God desires to comfort us in our loneliness and self-doubt.

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”

Who is it that God is speaking these words to today? Is it possible that God is speaking these words to you, and if so, are you prepared to comfort God’s people or is anything holding you back?

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”

*Are you aware of the gifts God has given YOU to **comfort those you encounter**?*

Sometimes we may imagine that God has given others all the important gifts and graces, but God is asking each of us to comfort those we encounter. If we ever find ourselves distracted by how little comfort we believe we can offer, let us remember that the ultimate comfort arrived in the form of a helpless child that needed everyone else’s comforting and support to grow into the person whose love overcame even death.

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”



God of love, in this season of preparation, we pray that you prepare our hearts to comfort the people we encounter with the gift of ourselves. Let your love be expressed through our efforts to comfort others, and may these efforts free us from anything that holds us back from praising, reverencing and serving you.

Daniel Valcazar II, M.Div. '17

Campus Minister for Spirituality, Notre Dame High School San Jose

December 11

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 96; Matthew 18:12-14

In today's Scriptures we get a glimpse into the minds of the exiled Judeans. Feeling discouraged, they begin considering Babylonian religion. But Isaiah reminds them there is no other god like the Lord; God will return them to Jerusalem. Isaiah offers hope, but they must be patient and remember that God who is eternal will renew their strength. The reading from the Gospel of Matthew reinforces a reciprocal relationship of love and trust between us and the Lord.

As I reflect on the Scriptures, I am reminded of my journey as a student at the Jesuit School of Theology. It has been an incredible journey from the friends I have made, to the professors who have nurtured my academic explorations, to the life-giving liturgies I have experienced. Neatly tucked away in the depths of my heart, I am aware that with every day that passes, I come closer to the end of this journey. Today's Scriptures give me hope. When this journey ends, I will not be alone. The Lord has accompanied me in difficult moments at JST through the love of the people I have met, and God will continue to accompany me in ministry. How easy it is for ME to abandon God and my trust in God the moment I experience unfamiliarity, uneasiness, or am pushed out of my comfort zone. "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." May this Advent season bring you much needed rest as we wait in joyful hope for the birth of our Lord.



Lord, open my heart that I may hear your loving voice and feel your warm embrace in those you place before me. Amen.

Graciela Garza, M.T.S '20

December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zechariah 2:14-17; Psalm Judith 13:18; Luke 1:26-38

The apparition of *la Virgencita*, Our Lady of Guadalupe, was a sign of great hope in the midst of what were very dark times for the indigenous people of Mexico. The death and destruction brought by the Spaniards threatened the dignity and existence of the indigenous people. Yet, “a great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” This woman, the Blessed Mother Mary, appears as an indigenous person and spoke to Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin in his native language, affirming his identity and inspiring him to be a voice of hope for his people by spreading the good news of Christ, who was born for all people without exception.

Mary ventures out to encounter Juan Diego on Tepeyac hill, not unlike how she “set out and traveled to the hill country in haste,” in order to encounter her cousin Elizabeth. In both instances, she appears as an expectant mother, with Jesus in her womb. While she has been told that she will give birth to a son who will be “great and will be called Son of the Most High,” she could not have fully grasped what his birth would mean. Yet, in the midst of that uncertainty, Mary does not hide in fear, but ventures out courageously, saying to her cousin, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” May her words inspire us to place our hope in Christ’s approaching birth and to trust in God’s providential care for us.



Loving and merciful God, we ask that through the intercession of *la Virgencita*, that we may recognize your holy presence in all people, especially those who are marginalized by society, and that we may be steadfast in our faith and courageous in sharing your love as we prepare for our Savior’s birth.

Kyle Shinseki, S.J., M.Div ‘18, STL/Th.M. ‘19

Campus Minister, Faith Formation and Intercultural Ministry, Santa Clara University

December 13

Memorial of St. Lucy

Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1; Matthew 11:16-19

"What is possible is not to see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God's hindquarters fade in the distance.

So stay. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder.

There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing.

For now, stay. Wait.

Something is on the horizon."

-Jan L. Richardson Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas.

I revisit this prayer every Advent and am often struck by its continued relevance. It is far too easy for me to forget to pause, take a breath, and simply reflect. The question "How are you doing?" is met most often by "Busy, but good." Am I really good? Or am I just busy? Am I even aware of how I am truly feeling? Or how I truly am?

Advent invites us to recall how we are and, more importantly, who we are. It is a time to remember to take pause and simply be...with ourselves, with each other, with God.

Today's Gospel is a challenging reminder to really take notice of the prophets in our lives who we often ignore or reject. The refugee. The transgender. The homeless. Or, perhaps, simply someone with whom we strongly disagree - they can often be our greatest teachers. When will we open our eyes to truly see the world around us and to ask it, what are you teaching me? Who do you need me to be?

Perhaps the season of Advent, with its air of mystery, hope, anticipation, and joy can be just the occasion to sit with the world and pay attention.



Patience God, today we ask that you interrupt our busy lives with silence and reflection. We ask that you open us up to see the things in our world we often fail to notice. We ask you to reveal your wisdom in and through the most unusual of prophets. May each person we meet, particularly those who irritate, surprise, or provoke us, be an invitation into wonder.

Charles Mansour

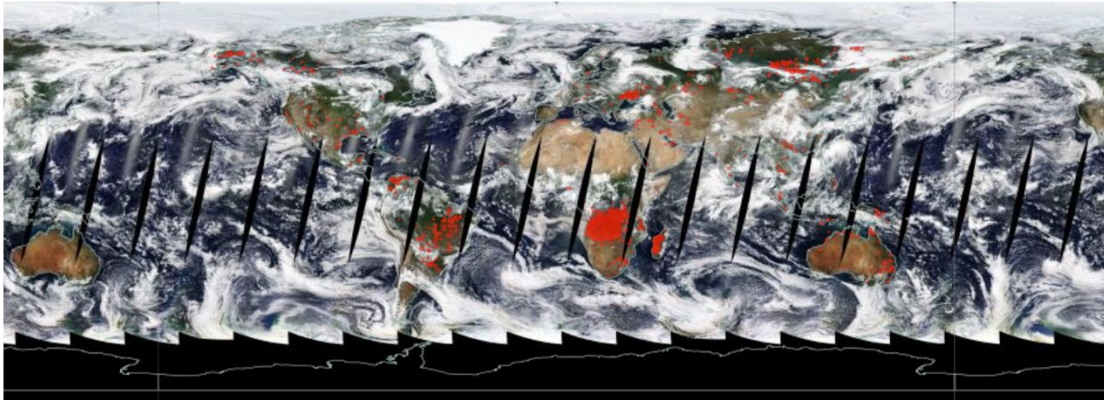
Director of Immersions, Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education

December 14

Memorial of St. John of the Cross

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Psalm 80; Matthew 17:9A, 10-13

*NASA's Worldwide Satellite Detections of
Fire*



*Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move in.
--Rilke*

Here in California and in regions around the world fires rage, ravage forests, char churches, scorch schools, level homes. Destroy lives. In many ways, these flames map externally the interior territories of our broken and incendiary relationships--with ourselves, one another, and our planet. Images, such as those recorded by NASA's Worldview Satellite, provide a tragic landscape of a visibly wounded planet.

*The earth is a prophet we do not recognize.
From her we have turned away.
She is calling us to turn back our hearts,
but we do to her whatever we please.*

Underlying such devastating realities as climate chaos burns another kind of fire: what Saint John of the Cross, whose feast we celebrate today, refers to as "llama de amor viva," the "living flame of love." Love's fire is not destructive but restorative. It beckons us back to the hearth of right relationship, leading us inward while at the same time onward. It transforms the predictability of probability into the boundlessness of possibility. Death into life.

Divine love, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si*, does not give up; rather, it "constantly impels us to find new ways forward."



*Living Flame,
Heart of the Universe,
may we recognize
your luminous love
in and around us,
as we prepare
new pathways forward
to your infinite light.
In our quest for life-sustaining practices,
may our fury over planetary degradation
and our quest for what is not-yet
be nonviolent, creative
and full of compassion
for all living beings.
In Advent hope, we pray
--AMEN*



The Prophet Elijah and the Fiery Chariot, by Carrie Rehak.

Carrie Rehak, Ph.D., GTU '06
Director of the JST Renewal Program and Field Ed Supervisor

December 15

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10; Psalm 146; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

The readings for today all speak to the hopeful longing and anticipation of the coming of the Lord. The first reading from Isaiah encourages us to “Be strong, fear not! Here is your God...he comes to save you.” And at the end of this reading we can anticipate “joy and gladness.” Sounds great in my book! Bring it on!

But not so quick as we are warned in the second reading from James to “be patient” and “don’t complain.” Thus, joy, gladness, and the coming of the Lord are not quite here yet and so we need to sit tight, be patient, and wait longer. Bummer!

When we get to the Gospel reading from Matthew, we hear about John the Baptist being in prison and asking his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the anointed one or should we look for another. Jesus answers, in part, by referring back to the first reading for today stating that the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the good news is preached. In other words... bingo! We have a winner! Terrific! Looks like our waiting is over! But then Jesus then speaks of the importance of John the Baptist stating that John is “preparing the way” and that “among those born of women there has been none greater.” High praise indeed!

What is striking to me is that Jesus, the Lord, acknowledges himself as the anointed one foretold in Isaiah but quickly and graciously directs his attention to complementing John. He also makes clear that John, that scraggily guy eating locust and wild honey crying out in the wilderness, is so important. Jesus models graciousness, generosity, and warns us that his messenger may not exactly look like who you were expecting. Isn’t there a great lesson here that helps us appreciate that the sacred and divine may come in unlikely packages?



Lord, help us to see your prophets and messengers in unlikely places and people recognizing that those who may be not look the part or those dressed in fine clothes with fancy titles, addresses, degrees, and bank accounts may be your humble prophets and messengers to us all. Lord, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Come Lord Jesus ...and help us to be ready. Amen.

Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D., ABPP
Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J. University Professor, and
Professor of Psychology and, by courtesy, Religious Studies
Director, Applied Spirituality Institute

December 16

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17A; Psalm 25; Matthew 21:23-27

The chief priests and elders challenge Jesus in the midst of his teaching: *By whose authority does he teach and act?* Jesus doesn't answer them directly. I recognize their frustration – I often want a simple, clear, direct answer from God. Instead, Jesus asks them to discern: *Is this thing of God?* He asked them, essentially, to examine the context to find the divine. They could bring all their wisdom to bear as leaders of the people – theological, legal, historical, cultural, spiritual. They could use their whole minds, bodies and spirits to observe and discern the divine, whether in John's prophecies or in the words and actions of Jesus.

Recently, I accompanied pilgrims from all over the world who went to San Salvador to remember the Jesuits killed 30 years ago at the University of Central America. Those servant leaders studied the context in El Salvador, examining the conditions of the people with their theological, political, economic and sociological wisdom. When they asked, *Is this thing of God?*, they had to conclude it was not. The war, societal structures and oppressive conditions were not just, loving and freeing for the people. After their discernment, they taught, wrote academic proposals and spoke out, pushing for a more just and peaceful society. They spoke with the authority of God and at risk to their own lives.

How will we approach the context in which we live? Will we stand by like the chief priests and decline to take a firm stand on whether something is "of God" to avoid answering the most difficult questions? Or will we teach, write, speak and act in pursuit of divine justice and the things of God?



Merciful Teacher, help us to recognize where we must speak up and act out. Fill us with your Holy Spirit to give us strength to do so when we are afraid of being wrong or afraid of the consequences for ourselves.

Lisa Kloppenberg
Interim Provost, Dean and Professor of Law
Santa Clara University

December 17

Tuesday of the Third Week Advent

Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72; Matthew 1:1-17

Be attentive!

There are five women in this genealogy and I initially missed them. Did you? Of the 48 total names in Matthew's list, 43 are men. I am counting Bathsheba's name because even after all of the trauma she endured at King David's hands, she is merely called "the wife of Uriah." I did not notice Bathsheba and these four other women until I was taught to be attentive.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary.

In a JST course entitled "The Children of Sarah, Hagar, and Mary," we were asked to ponder why Matthew would have inserted five women into this male-dominated list of names. Was it random or an error? Matthew tells us that the total number of generations from Abraham to David; from David to the Babylonian exile; and from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, is precisely fourteen generations each.

We were instructed that in Hebrew, David's name is spelled "דוד." Since each letter is assigned a number in Hebraic script, the numerical equivalent of David's name is $ד+ו+ד$, that is $4+6+4$, which equals fourteen.

This is not an error.

Matthew is purposefully telling us that if it were not for the lives of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary – not to mention generations of other unnamed women – Jesus could not be who he is. If we take the time to learn about each of these women we will find that they embody what we love about Jesus: they are not self-serving, they act on others' behalf despite great personal risk, and they play a role in the divine plan for God's people.

It is the third week of Advent: Are we being attentive? Are we noticing what God is doing in our lives or in the lives of others? Please pray with me...



God of the many generations, teach us to be attentive. Form our hearts so we avoid taking people in our lives for granted. Help us to become aware of those among us who remain hidden. As we live into this third week of Advent, please give us the grace to be courageous and unselfish like Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Amen.

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

December 18

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Psalm 72; Matthew 1:18-25

Born into a non-Catholic family, I was baptised when I was a high-school student. I still vividly remember that day when Sr. Janet, our catechist, asked us to pick a baptismal name. I went through the list of saints' names: Agatha, Bernadette, Catherine, Dorothy.... All beautiful names, but I did not know much about these holy people. Then the name Emmanuel caught my eye and I was so excited that I blurted out with pride, "Ah, this I know! Emmanuel, God is with me!" Smiling, Sr. Janet spoke in her usual gentle tone, "Emmanuel, God is with *us*." "Oh yes, God is with *us*! Sister, I love this name. I'll take it." That is how I got my baptismal name, and it always reminds me of the important message it carries: God is not only with me; God is with each of us!

In many cultures, personal names are often meaningful, bearing a certain expectation, conviction, or memory. A personal name in the Bible further represents the essence of the life, a character trait, or the mission of the person. Etymologically speaking, "Emmanuel" is a Hebrew compound name: עִמָּנוּ אֵל. The first part עִמָּנוּ is formed by combining the preposition "with" and the pronominal suffix "us"; the second part אֵל is the theophoric element "el", meaning "god". By employing other prepositions, names like "Alenuel" ("God [is] above us") and "Banuel" ("God [is] among us") can be created. One might wonder why it is "Emmanuel", not others, that is the name that first appears in Isaiah 7:14. The answer lies in today's Gospel reading, for Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God-with-us.

We have been hearing a lot of names in the readings these few days. How about your name? What is its meaning—in itself, and for you?



"The Lord is our justice." May we join all the faithful in blessing this name of the Lord not simply with our lips, but with our deeds. Amen.

Lisa Hui, S.T.D. '20

December 19

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25A; Psalm 71; Luke 1:5-25

Hope in an unexpected place.

In today's Gospel reading, Zechariah is met by an angel of the Lord who says to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son." Elizabeth, we soon learn, was thought to be barren. For both Elizabeth and Zechariah, hope shows up in an unexpected place.

Faith when it doesn't make sense.

Zechariah cannot accept that his prayer had been answered and points to the realities around him as reasons it cannot be true. "For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years," he protests. Zechariah is short on faith because the circumstances don't make sense.

The gift of new life.

Elizabeth, whose narrative is largely untold in today's reading, goes on to give birth to a son, John the Baptist. Today's Gospel reading, like our Advent journey together, is leading us to the gift of new life.

New life: God's promise fulfilled, even though Zechariah was not ready to receive it.

New life: God's promise fulfilled, even if, at times, we are not ready to receive it.

Hope in an unexpected place.

An invitation.

Take a moment and bring to mind your community, your family, your friends, your school or place of work, the country and political climate you live in. With this context in mind, reflect on the following questions:

In what unexpected place might hope emerge? Do you have faith that God can meet you in that space, even if it doesn't make sense? How can you prepare your heart to receive the gift of new life?



God of hope, thank you for showing up in unexpected places. Thank you for your steadfast love, even when we are not ready to receive it. Thank you for the gift of new life. Prepare our hearts, as together we wait in joyful hope. Amen.

Drew Roberts
Assistant Dean, Enrollment Management & Marketing
Jesuit School of Theology

December 20

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24; Luke 1:26-38

I am a planner. I enjoy planning out my day, week, and even my month so that I can make the most of my time and accomplish the goals I set for myself. While reflecting on today's readings, I could not help but imagine myself in Mary's place. I am sure that Mary also had plans for her day and for her life. Perhaps she was dreaming of her future life with Saint Joseph, or maybe was simply figuring out what to make for dinner. But then, without any advance notice or warning, Mary hears that her life will be heading in a very different direction. Without hesitation, she accepts this call from God, giving up her own plans. In our lives, the best made plans don't always play out as we think they may. Our plans may be interrupted by a new employment opportunity, a health diagnosis, or an unexpected family issue. These interruptions may be God nudging our lives in a different direction, a bit more subtly than an angel's appearance. How open are we to the small or large nudges of God's plans for us? I invite you to engage in a similar contemplation of being in Mary's place. What are your plans in life? If God called you to live a vastly different life, how eager would you be to affirmatively answer that call? During these last few days of Advent, let us pray that our hearts remain open to receive the Lord's plan for us.



*God, you came into this world as a tiny babe in Mary's womb.
Come into my heart as a tiny voice growing stronger amidst the chaos in my life.
May I listen to the nudges in my heart that are leading me closer to You.
Grant me patience, when a plan that I have is interrupted in a way I did not imagine.
Remain ever present in my heart. Amen.*

Alyse Hudock
Campus Minister for Residence Life & Graduate Students
Santa Clara University

December 21

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

Song of Songs 2:8-14; Psalm 33; Luke 1:39-45

During this holiday season, many of us will pass through airports as we travel to spend time with family and friends. I've realised that the arrival halls of airports are places where people experience much joy as they reunite with loved ones (though the opposite can be said of departure halls) and it's very consoling to be a witness to the outpouring of joy that people show during these times. These demonstrations of love that are ever-present are reminders of the continual presence of God and God's love among us, a love that's made even more palpable in our celebration of Christ's nativity.

The readings point to this love and two movements that flow from it – the anticipation of the beloved and the great demonstration of joy at the encounter. The author of the Song of Songs so beautifully described the coming of the beloved, showing how the anticipation of the encounter is akin to flowers blooming, slowly opening our hearts to the fullness of joy that will come to pass when the lover and beloved finally meet. The encounter that is described in the Visitation gives us a taste of the quality of joy that can occur when we meet Jesus. John the Baptist leapt in the womb of his mother Elizabeth at this encounter but the word in Greek (*skirtaō*) points to a joy that's deeper and more exuberant. The word that's often translated as "leap" comes from a word that means "to skip" or "dance with joy." That brings out the true sense of the encounter between John the Baptist and his cousin – a joy that's so deep that it made him dance with joy in the womb of his mother. Let's open our hearts so that we too can dance with joy at the coming of our Saviour this Christmas.



*We cry out with joy to God-with-us,
we sing to the Lord of all the earth,
we dance and leap with great delight,
For soon shall be our Saviour's birth!*

*We pray for grace to spread our joy,
to those who feel the dark and cold.
That we can share the light of Christ,
and in his loving arms enfold.
Amen.*

Stanley Goh, S.J., STL '21

December 22

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of the Savior came about... something went awry. Holy Spirit subverted the law. With the Spirit's encouragement, Joseph ignored the law - twice - and lived into a new way, thus opening the path for God to accomplish the salvation of the people...

Everything was going fine. The young Mary was pledged in marriage to the responsible Joseph. Families agreed. Bride price was paid. All that was left to do was to wait to formally establish a household. The same story as their cousins, neighbors, and temple community.

And then it wasn't.

The same story would not bring about the salvation of the world; it was time for a new story.

When Joseph looked to the Law for what to do, it didn't help:

"But if a new husband cannot find evidence of the young woman's virginity, they shall bring the young woman to the entrance of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a shameful crime in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. Thus shall you purge the evil from your midst." ~Deuteronomy 22: 20-22

How many times had Joseph witnessed public execution? Did he know from experience what brutal atrocity for which the Law called? I picture him agonizing over this decision for many nights, well before the angel came. What to do?

In this new story, the man did not exercise his legal right to have the woman publicly killed. In this story, the man allowed his heart to take over where his brain may have inflicted slaughter. It seems that when he checked the Law against his conscience, they did not match. He needed to ignore it and submit to the inklings of his conscience.

In this story, this man says ENOUGH.

He had already decided this when the angel arrives and pushes him to ignore the Law in sending Mary away quietly. The angel then tells him to take one step further. "Do not push her away. Bring her in. There is more to this story."



God, show us where you want us to draw closer to the unexpected. When we may want to distance ourselves from what seems like trouble, give us wise hearts to know when to cozy up and when to place distance. Send us your courageous Spirit whose guidepost is Love that we may continue to help clear the way for your saving work in the world. Amen.

Molleen N. Dupree-Dominguez, M.Div., '03

Molleen N. Dupree-Domingez is a teacher, minister, and writer living in the beautiful Bay Area of California. She currently teaches Religious Studies at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland. She earned a Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School in 2003. Since then, she has worked in Service-Learning, parish ministry, and high school ministry and teaching. She hosts a podcast entitled *On a Mission* where she interviews people who are ready to get real and go deep with God, including some JST alums! Find her writing and podcasting at molleendupreedominguez.com

December 23

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

Elizabeth gave birth to a son and she named him John. His naming was perceived as controversial. You see, the name they chose was not common to his family. His parents were questioned about their decision. But Elizabeth and Zechariah were certain. “He will be called John.”

From what we learn in the story, John’s relatives and neighbors were shocked and they expressed their shock to all of Judea. It sounds like it was the talk of the town, a trending story in modern terms. Elizabeth and Zechariah did not follow the customary way of proceeding for naming a child. They knew it was time for change and for transformation. They were prepared and able to say, “Yes.” Their call from God was clear. Their strenuous waiting was over. Their long awaited child, their love, was born. John, God has been gracious.

It makes me think about how often we or the ones we love experience situations like this family. I imagine this to be something like when we share a truth about ourselves and receive a response that is not what we hope or respond to someone’s truth with hesitation or weariness or dismay. Instances where we are told or say, “that’s not how it usually works” or “your name cannot be...” or “you can’t be called to that.”

Today on this Eve of Christmas Eve, Elizabeth and Zechariah invite us to gaze at the horizon. To witness the blossoming dawn. To find the star in the sky. To hold the love planted in our hearts. To believe in our truest self. To respect the truth of others. To always move towards unifying love that can only transform the world.



God of gracious love, as we prepare the way for you to enter into the world today and everyday, instill in us the spirit of John’s naming, the courage of Elizabeth and the voice of Zechariah. May we accept their invitation to know your love when we experience rejection or heartbreak and to be ever more open to transformation, to the unexpected, to your gracious love.

Natalie Terry, MDiv ‘15
Coordinator of Service & Social Advocacy, Carondelet High School

December 24

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent, Christmas Eve

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16; Psalm 89; Luke 1:67-79

The hidden insight in today's readings is a deeply human challenge: Things draw us closer to God; things obstruct our closeness to God.

When David acknowledges his cedar house, he draws attention to our human need for special, lovely, comforting things. But the Living God snaps back: "Why would David think that the One who overpowered both pharaoh and the treacherous waters of the Red Sea that imprisoned Israel in Egypt could possibly desire, let alone "need" a "dwelling" place?" Oh the human need for things. Sacred spaces help us. Our incarnate selves need places and sights and sounds that shape doorways for encountering God's vast, distinct, character.

I have a lovely donkey from a Hummel Creche Set that was given to me by a group of friends to mark our study of the Nativity Stories. She is a ceramic talisman of that community and how they shaped and continue to reside in my life. She sits on my mantle year round. I move her into my family's creche during Advent. She is always a sacred object; she becomes more intensely so when she moves from the mantle to the manger scene. Mostly people who notice her wonder why there is a donkey on my mantle.

Our God cannot be contained; our God is not some natural force or random power. Our God is always with us; our God requires no building. And yet, we build beautiful spaces; we collect images; I keep my little donkey.

And so it was for Israel. The Temple, that ought to have made Zechariah more alert to God's messenger, seems not to have done so. Today's Gospel reading has become the Great Canticle for Morning prayer. Yet, we need remember that Zechariah's song comes after a correction. The Temple elite was previously made mute in order to mark his doubt. He comes later to recognize the enormous capacity of God's presence and activity. Here on this final day before the angels speak to us again, let us be alert to all the sights and sounds and "things" of Christmas so that they amplify the angels and not mute their voices.



O Lord who both whispers in comfort and roars in delight, help us grow in our capacity to find you in stereo: the God who is enormous source of everything thing whose presence is so abundant it cannot be contained but who is also completely present in the lights, colors, sounds of Christmas. You cannot be contained but you have promised to draw near at our invitation in even the smallest things. Help us to hear you in the "Hark" of Christmas song and in the soft "hello" of any and all persons passing by. Amen.

Sally Vance-Trembath
Senior Lecturer, Religious Studies, Santa Clara University

December 25

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

On Christmas Eve I celebrated Mass with women incarcerated in a federal correction institute, where some of our students at the Jesuit School of Theology do ministry. Liturgy began shortly after sunset, when cool darkness enshrouded these grounds. We were greeted by Isaiah's words: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." In this setting it is not difficult to imagine darkness and gloom. The prophet continues with amazing words: you [God] have brought "abundant joy and great rejoicing." For the yokes and the boots that normally burdened and injured them will be destroyed when "a child is born to us, a son is given us."

How can such magical words seem real in this setting, where inmates seemingly have lost their freedom to search for God-among-us? They might yearn to be elsewhere on this day, and to be with different companions, but they . . . and we . . . join together and celebrate the birth of the divine One who is enfleshed here, in our midst. Whatever the hopes for Christmas joy, they will come from the Spirit moving within us, in prayer and song, in personal petitions voiced aloud, in reception of Eucharist and sharing signs of peace.

Perhaps some among this group recognize each other as shepherds, to whom God's angel appears, inviting others to see "an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." No trappings of royalty in Bethlehem's stable or in this place, no reasons for arrogance in their midst, only a deep personal sharing with this little family of three, huddling together around a manger for animals. Perhaps this scene can pinpoint the reality of the Incarnation for us: our God is incarnate in our particular humanity, whether sad and forlorn, or glorious and bright. I am certain that *this infant* proclaims peace, and that love hovered over those in that prison chapel, as we celebrated the Christmas Eucharist together.



O God of light, dispel the darkness and gloom of our lives and our world. Shine on the babe who enfleashes your Being in our midst. Bring warmth and joy to those in prisons and join them with loved ones by the strong bonds of Your love.

Amen.

John Endres, S.J.

Professor Emeritus of Old Testament

December 26

Feast of St. Stephen

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Psalm 31; Matthew 10:17-22

Yesterday we celebrated the feast of the Nativity of our savior Jesus Christ. The Nativity is a symbolic event that can have many different meanings. Through the martyrdom of Stephen, which we celebrate today, we can learn one of those meanings.

The story of the martyrdom of Stephen portrays a battle between two groups of people. One group, the persecutors, has more power than the other group, the persecuted Christians. Stephen, as a follower of Christ, lives a life that is in total contradiction to that of his persecutors. His life was shaped by the values of Christianity, which at the time was in opposition to the dominant culture.

Through the nativity of Jesus and the martyrdom of Stephen, we learn that Jesus' message is a counter-cultural message. It is an invitation to perceive the values of this world through the lens of the powerless. That perception is at times very radical and can have negative consequences. In the world that we live in, if a person's way of life is counter-cultural, the obvious outcome is disapproval by others. Many people might call out or critique a person that delivers such a message. As Christians, this potential consequence should not bother us or halt our efforts, because we will be living the authentic message of Jesus. Stephen shows us that Christianity challenges us to work for social transformation, cultural transformation and even religious transformation.



Christ Jesus, give us the courage to stand by the values of the Gospel, even in the face of opposition. Amen.

Nelson Nyamayaro, S.J., S.T.L. '20

December 27

Feast of St. John, Apostle and evangelist

1 John 1:1-4; Psalm 97; John 20:1A and 2-8

Today's reading from John's Gospel introduces us to a bleak scene: Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus' tomb to care for his body after he died. Imagine. She witnessed her friend unjustly accused, tortured and killed. A week later she returns to the tomb to take care of his body. She mustered up all her courage, compassion and strength to do what needed to be done. She went to face her friend: bloody, broken, and lifeless. They rolled back the big, heavy stone. And then... nothing! Jesus was not there!

Like Mary, we summon our courage, compassion, and strength to care for our loved ones. We want to be there for people who are hurting, broken, and in despair. As we roll away the stone and witness tragedy, we too feel the need to run in fear when Jesus is not there; when Jesus died because of war; when Jesus died due to starvation; when he died on the street from exposure. When I'm face-to-face with the suffering Christ, I take my heavy heart to my friends, in whom I find comfort.

The story continues from today's Gospel to recount that Mary Magdalene chooses to stay at the tomb and weep for her friend. Mary stays with Jesus in his darkest moments: at the foot of the cross, at his tomb. In her darkness, a light appeared to Mary: the resurrection. Jesus also wanted to care for his friend. So, he came back to comfort her distress, ease her grief, and give her hope.

After Christmas, the Holy Spirit moves us to stay, to linger a little longer in the season of Advent. When we encounter evil and despair in our world, God tells us, *hang on. Stay with me.*



Since his birth, Jesus meets us again and again

To comfort our distress

Ease our grief

Give us hope

Let us linger a little longer in the season of Advent and celebrate

This precious, baby boy

Our dear friend

Jesus

Maddie LaForge, M.Div. '20

December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs

1 John 1:5-2:2; Psalm 124; Matthew 2:13-18

Today's Gospel reminds us of King Herod. Herod the Great, King of Judea, a high achiever, managed to do many "great" things according to human standards: he built fortresses, temples, amphitheaters, et cetera. I like to think that he also managed to win the trust of Julius Caesar, and with the utmost cruelty he managed to carry out the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem.

Herod was a violent, merciless, foolish, intolerant, ignorant, impatient, jealous, cruel, unjust, proud, ungrateful, false prophet. He was a wolf that loved to scatter and destroy the sheep. His mentality went against everything that is Godlike.

However, there is hope. Today's Gospel also reminds me of another high achiever: St. Paul. Unlike Herod, St. Paul, with great humility, was able to fall to the ground and look deeply within himself. It was at that moment that St. Paul heard Jesus asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting." Unlike Herod, St. Paul took accountability for his actions. (Acts 22:7-8)

As Christians, we are called to be humble and courageous like St. Paul and the holy family. We are called to emulate the courage of Mary and Joseph who, to protect Jesus at all costs, fled to Egypt seeking refuge. We are called to do whatever it is in our power to stop and change this wolfish mentality inside ourselves and in our world.



Emmanuel, Prince of Life, upholder of all things, give us the courage to look deep within ourselves. I pray that by your grace we may be able to change all the wolfish tendencies in ourselves and in our world so that in our humanity we may more resemble your divinity. Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam. Amen.

Laura Nieto
Admissions and Scholarship Aid Specialist

December 29

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128; Colossians 3:12-21; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Today we are celebrating the *Feast of the Holy Family*; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Although we are still in the Octave of Christmas and, ideally, we should be exuberant with the joy and rigor of our Savior entering the course of human history, we are nevertheless presented with the stark reality of evil in today's Gospel reading. It is a reality that will follow Jesus during his life and eventually lead to his crucifixion. Jesus, despite being a vulnerable infant, is hunted down by the forces of evil. Why? Because he is the defining factor, he, who will eventually unmask evils' machinations and dissipate its reign and terror in human affairs. Yet still, evil will cast upon Jesus the burden of being depicted as a person of considerable controversy. It will be precisely in this great controversy that the prophecy uttered by Simeon at the *Presentation of Jesus in the temple* will be fulfilled; "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35).

The way of the cross will henceforth be the marked path for all the disciples of Jesus. Hence, Christians should be open to this possibility and path. Mary and Joseph serve as ideal disciples in this regard. They sacrifice their all to serve and save baby Jesus, such that the *Holy Family* experiences a perilous life of displacement, deprivation and refugee status. Notwithstanding this grim experience, God flips the tables. At every dire strait in Jesus' life, God confirms Jesus' identity and messianic mission: *Out of Egypt I called my son*; and at another point, *He shall be called a Nazorean*.



Almighty God, thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, your Son, the greatest manifestation of your love for us. Grant, we pray, that he may accompany all of your children, migrants and refugees who suffer displacement on account of political, economic, social, and climate instability. May he grant them a joyful hope which he alone can fulfill, for He lives and reigns now and forever, Amen!

Andrew Simpasa, S.J.
S.T.L. 2020

December 30

The Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas

1 John 2:12-17; Psalm 96; Luke 2:36-40

In the letter from John, there is an inter-generational call to renounce worldly pleasures for greater meaning. John specifies that he is writing to fathers (a patriarchal term we might interpret as elders), young people, and children. It is the burden of each generation to take up the radical call of Christ to seek depth and not distraction.

This call to generations is temporal; it brings us into relationship with the past and with the future. Climate activist Greta Thunberg was just named TIME magazine's Person of the Year and is just one of many teenage activists who have entered the public eye recently: think also of Emma Gonzalez and the March for Our Lives movement for gun control. Upon her election, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest congresswoman in United States history at age 29. I mention these young change-makers as prophetesses not unlike Anna in our Gospel reading from Luke, who appears as an early evangelizer of the birth of the young Christ.

As our country struggles with climate change, gun violence, and immigration, we must heed the call of John and follow the example of Anna by recognizing our ties to the future and by beginning to truly listen to those who have renounced a pretentious life, as John calls it, for an everlasting love of humanity and all creation. The Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Preferences call us into accompaniment of young people in the next decade. In light of our readings today, I challenge us to take a moment to reflect on our own relationship to the future and what it means to accompany those whose futures will outlast our own as Christ did in his own life and death.



God of all generations, God who outlasts time, may you give us the courage to see outside of ourselves and to embrace lives of stewardship and grace.

Barbara Anne Kozee

M.Div. '22

December 31

The Seventh Day of the Octave of Christmas

1 John 2:18-21; Psalm 96; John 1:1-18

Until recently, my morning routine has included running (that is, *jogging – really slow jogging*) on the campus of our neighbors, the University of California, Berkeley. I write “until recently” because last week I was chased by a vicious dog that was off-leash. This incident has totally interrupted my morning routine. Though I was not bitten, the saying “once bitten, twice shy” comes to mind every morning as I follow the paths along the perimeter of the campus rather than venturing along the lovely paths within. I have even thought of carrying a club with me to fend off any aggressive dog.

We spend a lot of time figuring out how to protect ourselves, how to make ourselves less vulnerable. Protecting ourselves from vicious dogs and possible muggers on city streets, yes; but also from broken hearts and disappointments.

Maybe when it comes to affairs of the heart and soul I’m invited to embrace more intimately the mystery set before us in today’s reading: that the Word without whom nothing came to be became one with us, became vulnerable, defenseless. Maybe vulnerability is where life is found.

In Baz Luhrmann’s movie *Strictly Ballroom*, the characters discover the perennial truth that “a life lived in fear is a life half lived.” God loves us, and the great divine desire for us is that we live full lives confident in this love. As we welcome a new year, we do so with the assurance that the Word has come into this world and found its place among us. Maybe, just maybe, I can venture into the world in love with more vulnerability and less fear.



Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe!

Blessed are you, for in the Incarnation you chose to live among us.

Help us to live less guarded lives, to live lives more open to love and new life. Amen.

Martin Connell, SJ, MDiv '93
Rector, Jesuit Community at JST

January 1

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

[Number 6:22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21](#)

When we celebrated Jesus' birth just a week ago on Christmas, we rejoiced that God is with us! Now on the threshold of a new year, we pause to breathe in the reassuring joy of Jesus' birth. We're tempted after all the holiday festivities and songs to rush headlong back into busy-ness, where time to savor the Incarnation seems distressingly scarce. But not so fast.

Today's readings invite us into deeper contemplation of who God is, just as Mary treasured this same mystery in her heart. What's most striking in these readings is how they connect God's tender gaze with a new mother's love. We grasp that God's regard for us is visceral and protective like a mother's love, tender and embracing like a mother's love, fierce and in-our-corner like a mother's love. God's love is also completely simple like the adoration in a nursing infant's eyes when she gazes up and her mother gazes down.

Unfortunately, mother-love is sometimes scarce when many children are born into life without human security and tenderness. While most of us have not had perfect mother-love, still our parents or a teacher gave us affection and support that we could count on. Such experiences become the touchstone for knowing more about God's love. We have a friend who stands by us in a storm of clashes, listening without judging. Our neighbors feed our kids when we're sick or suffering a family loss. The smile of a stranger in a store or on the unfamiliar street assures us of safety when we're lost. An unexpected hug or swift thank you tells us someone recognizes our generosity. These events are God-among-us, God's tender blessing for us in every corner of our chaotic lives.

On the threshold of this new year, having celebrated Christmas, God gives us *again* the chance to incarnate divine love for the people around us. Let us practice the mother-love, the in-our-corner love of God-among-us. Let us live as Emmanuel in the world this year.



God of Gracious Blessing, gaze tenderly upon us and be gentle with us, just as Mary gazed tenderly and gently upon her newborn son. Kindle in our hearts a mother's tenderness, a child's trust, and a savior's passion. Let us be your Emmanuel, your mother-love blessing in the world this year.

Alison M. Benders
Interim Dean
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

January 2

Gratitude

As We Conclude:

Over the past month, the last month of the decade, we came together as a community connected through our shared reflection and prayer. In the first week of Advent, we reflected on hope and heard from Sara Postlethwaite, V.D.M.F., S.T.L. '21, who shared about hopeful artists who endure the harsh Canadian winters, creating beauty when all around appears dead. During the second week of Advent, in which we are called to faith, Professor Teresia Hinga reminded us of Mary's faith, which enabled her consent, her saying "yes" to God's plan. In our third week of Advent, a week of joy, Joshua Peters, S.J., shared the joys of being attentive, and his joyful discovery of the five women in Matthew's genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. During Advent's fourth week of peaceful preparation, Professor Vance-Trembath reflected on our preparations of sacred spaces, and how our creation of these physical realities can help us encounter God. On Christmas, Professor John Endres, S.J., encouraged us to remember that, "Whatever the hopes for Christmas joy, they will come from the Spirit moving within us, in prayer and song, in personal petitions voiced aloud, in reception of Eucharist and sharing signs of peace."

Thank you for participating in *Waiting in Joyful Hope* and praying with our community. This project is a labor of love and a reflection of the personal journeys of our contributors: students, alumni, faculty, and staff at the Jesuit School of Theology and Santa Clara University.

We look forward to continuing this journey together. *Waiting in Joyful Hope* will return next year, and we will again offer our online Lenten retreat, *A Heart Renewed*, which will begin on Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020. All current subscribers will continue to receive future seasonal reflections. If you would like to invite others to subscribe please refer them to [this link](#).