NEW BRUNSWICK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Think Critically • Act Justly • Lead Faithfully

Worry, Watch, Wait, Welcome, Wonder

Advent-Christmas Devotionals

November 30, 2025 – January 5, 2026

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Foreword

In the name of the Triune God, grace, mercy, and peace!

It is Advent again. We begin the cycle of celebrating Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension again. And once again, students, faculty, and alumni of New Brunswick Theological Seminary are pleased to bring you devotions for the four weeks of Advent and prayers for the twelve days of Christmas, organized by the Theological Writing Center. This year's devotions are organized around themes from Isaiah and Matthew—Worry, Watch, Wait, Welcome, and Wonder. We hope these devotions, in poetry and prose, will help you reflect on God's love and call to justice and faithful living.

The cover illustration is a picture of the tree in the lobby of the main Seminary building, with the "Jacob's Ladder" hanging art behind it. This lobby, outside of Mast Chapel and Hageman Hall, is the crossroads of our space. Here we meet and greet one another; from here we go out to share our light with the world. Here is where we continue to train and equip new generations of leaders to think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully, just like the generations represented here.

May these devotions enhance your celebration of the season, and may you have a blessed Advent and a joyous Christmas.

James Hart Brumm
Assistant Professor of Reformed Church Studies
Director of the Theological Writing Center

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All Scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition unless otherwise noted.

From the President

"Wait On the Lord"

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
    the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
    his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint
    and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
    and the young will fall exhausted,
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
    they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
    they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:28–31

This poetic and profound passage speaks to God's enduring strength and compassion. It begins with rhetorical questions—"Have you not known? Have you not heard?"—reminding readers of God's eternal nature, limitless understanding, and unwavering power. Unlike humans, who grow weary and faint, God remains steadfast and offers strength to the weak. The passage culminates in a promise: those who wait on the Lord will be renewed.

This scripture resonated deeply with my heart during a pivotal moment in college. As the eldest of seven children, I faced a painful dilemma: pursue education to help my family in the long term or stay home to support them immediately. Torn between duty and aspiration, I found temporary solace in joining a fraternity, but the emotional void remained. A transformative experience occurred when a friend invited me to church, where the pastor shared a meditation from Isaiah 40 before preaching. The combination of scripture and worship, especially the hymn "Amazing Grace," provided a spiritual awakening and a new lens through which to view life's struggles.

I have come to understand that to be human is to endure hardship—weakness, weariness, and failure are universal experiences. Yet Isaiah's message counters this reality with divine assurance: God is omnipotent and omnipresent, never tired or absent. The confusion arises when people interpret suffering as divine neglect, leading to feelings of unworthiness and spiritual defeat. This mindset becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, rooted in humanity's long history of sin and brokenness, dating back to Genesis.

This fallen nature is not a source of shame but a condition to confront. The current political and social turmoil is not unprecedented—it is part of a long continuum of human struggle. Isaiah calls believers to resist the "Spirit of Defeat" and remember that God empowers the powerless. The Israelites, under Assyrian threat and Babylonian captivity, felt abandoned, yet Isaiah reminded them God had not forgotten them.

The "Isaiah Fix" is God's invitation to wait—a sacred pause between suffering and deliverance. Waiting is not passive; it is a spiritual posture of trust. Even when the message was not fully grasped, God enacted a deeper solution: the Incarnation. In Christ, God stepped into human frailty, bore suffering, and offered redemption. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, believers are assured that endurance leads to renewal. Holy Friday's pain gives way to Holy Sunday's resurrection.

Christ, the Shepherd–King, embodies divine majesty and compassion. He holds creation in His hands, knows each person intimately, and offers refuge, justice, and strength. Because of Christ, believers can rise above despair, run without weariness, and walk without fainting.

As we celebrate Advent, we are called to reflect on the past, embrace the future, and continue to "Wait on the Lord."

Prayer

Lord
hear our heartfelt plea for divine guidance
through life's trials, studies, victories, and national challenges,
affirming that in every season.
Help us to wait on You our faithful God.

Micah L. McCreary
President of the Seminary
John Henry Livingston Professor of Theology

Week 1 of Advent

Worry: God is coming and we're not ready

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

You have forsaken your people, the house of Jacob,
for they are full of diviners from the East
and of soothsayers like the Philistines,
and they clasp hands with foreigners.
Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures;
their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots.
Their land is filled with idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their own fingers have made.
And so people are humbled, and everyone is brought low—
[do not forgive them!
Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust
from the terror of the Lord and from the glory of his majesty.]
The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low,
and the pride of everyone shall be humbled,
and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.
Isaiah 2:1-11

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.
Matthew 24:36-44

A Four-Hour Gig

I play in a classic rock band. We're gearing up for a gig in two days. What makes it particularly challenging is it's a four-hour gig—one hour longer than we've done before. That has meant adding at least eight more songs to our repertoire which engendered a whole lot more practice than we normally do; five hours more to be precise in a marathon practice this past Monday along with many more hours on my own polishing old songs and adding new.

Preparing for a gig or any other event we may be looking forward to often requires a lot of extra work. What it doesn't require is a lot of extra thought as to what exactly we need to do to get ready for it. The event determines the preparation. But how do we prepare for something that we can't even begin to imagine – the cosmic transformation of creation? What kind of practice does it take to get ready for that gig, especially when we have no clue when it might happen? ("about that day and hour no one knows.").

What Matthew suggests is that the "when" in this case is less important than the "what". Not knowing when it will happen essentially means that we should always be prepared, as we do when we install fire alarms for the eventuality of a fire with the important difference being that the preparations we make for this Event is not *in case* it happens (as is true with a fire, God forbid), but because we know it WILL happen.

The lack of clarity for the "when" necessitates a constant vigilance. As for what we need to do to be vigilant, Matthew says very little; nothing, in fact in this passage; mainly, I believe, because those who have read this far in his Gospel will have no doubts about what it takes to be ready – it's there in everything Jesus taught about loving God and neighbor; *every day, every hour;* loving God and neighbor.

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock" (Matthew 7: 24-25).

Prayer

God of Creation and Re-creation:
we are in awe of what you have done and are doing
to make things right in our lives and our world.
While we can't even begin to imagine what the future will look like when Jesus comes again,
we welcome what it means—that all creation will one day reflect your glory, your heart, your perfect will
—a New Heaven and New Earth where all is as it should be.
May we never give up that hope.
May we never stop living for that Day.

In Jesus precious name we pray.

John Hubers
Master of Divinity, Class of 1982

Ready or Not, Our Creator Is Coming

I wonder sometimes if I am really ready both in my heart and in my worldly life for when our Creator returns. I know I can improve in both my faith and spiritual life as well as in my life in the world. I must admit that I could minimize the number of physical things I have, do more to help those in need, and focus on being more spiritually ready for when our Creator comes.

The thing is our society is often focused on things like money and possessions. For some, it is also about self-concern rather than helping others or growth in our relationship with our Creator. This focus on worldly things, at least for me, is not a good way to prepare. I wonder if, as a society and maybe in my own life, we worship worldly things more than our Creator. What are some things we can do to re-focus on our relationship with our Creator?

The prophet Isaiah says, "Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made (Isaiah 2:7-8)." When I think about what Isaiah is saying here and what I said about the focus of society and my life, it doesn't prepare me for when our Creator comes. It is not about how much I have but how much I can do or give to help others and truly try to follow.

The apostle Matthew says, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mathew 24:36). "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mathew 24:44). When thinking about what Mathew is saying in these two verses, I want to focus more on preparing myself for when our Creator comes, because I do not know when or where our Creator will be coming.

How might we prepare for that time? We may want to continue growing our relationship with our Creator and think about what areas of our spiritual and physical (worldly) lives we can deepen in preparing ourselves for when our Creator comes.

Prayer

Creator of all things, thank you for giving us another day!
May we prepare ourselves for your return, with your guidance.
Forgive us Creator for not setting our eyes and our hearts fully on you.
Help us and guide us in our lives,
so that we can say to the best of our knowledge that we are ready for your arrival.
Creator, we ask that you show us mercy and forgiveness
when we do the opposite of what is the right thing to do.
Thank you, Creator,
in your most precious name.

Ari Grow
Master of Divinity Student

"Underneath the mask of the sulfur sky a bunch of us were busy . . . waiting"

(Bruce Cockburn)

I have spent much of the past few months waiting. Waiting for a birth even as my pregnant daughter and her husband scurry to prepare their house and lives for another child to be born. This time has also been spent in hospital waiting rooms, packing, driving to a distant city, and reading pamphlets regarding medical procedures as my wife gets poked and prodded and diagnosed with a disease we never saw coming.

Waiting in great hope for the child's first cry and waiting in fear of what might be 'taken away.' Waiting for what lies just around the turning of the canyon wall.

This is what Advent has become. Isaiah's hoped for world where swords are beaten into plowshares and AR-15s are used to prop up tomato plants is paired with a world where God's judgement enters like a deluge and sweeps away much of what we now know. How do we prepare for both of these unknowns?

Make no mistake, people were watching and waiting for the Messiah to come when Jesus entered the scene. They didn't recognize him then and I'm not confident that we will recognize him either should he arrive during our earthly watch. We would do well to not spend our time waiting looking at the heavens.

Rather we should be busy with our waiting. Isaiah's world without war won't come by work of ours, but we can actively wait for it by welcoming all and standing against those in masks who disappear our neighbors and like to shoot pepper balls into those who speak for peace.

And we can be busy with our waiting, reaching out 'as in the days of Noah' to be places of refugia (thank you Dr Rienstra) preserving and restoring as much as we can to be saved from the coming storm. If Jesus is referred to as the second Adam are we not then called to be the final Noahs?

A baby daughter is born as I write this and is being held in the arms of a grandmother who is ill, but savoring every, every minute she gets in this world of wonders.

Prayer

As we wait Lord,
give us neither false hope nor resigned despair.
Rather give us strength to greet the new day with a sense of purpose.
May we, in the words of Wendell Berry,
"work well so that a Sabbath mood rests on our day and finds it good."

Kent Busman
Master of Divinity, Class of 1992

When God Come Down

Written with a Caribbean poetic tongue

Hear mi now
de sea still whispering' prophecy
in de shell of de conch,
and de wind hums softly through de cane field,
sayin', *"Time drawin' near."*

Sun still rising' bright pon de bay,
people still dance,
still sell mango and fry fish at de corner,
but deep inside de drumbeat,
somethin' tremble like judgment.

Isaiah done tell we long time
de mountain of de Lord go rise higher
than any pride a man build.
All dem tall towers in de city,
glass an' steel reachin' to heaven,
go bow down low when de Holy One steps in.
De silver and gold dem hide in vaults,
dem can't buy mercy when de sky split open.
De proud heart go quake like bamboo in a storm.

But still
people laugh,
say tomorrow will be the same as today.
Like in de days of Noah,
rain fall suddenly when nobody is watching.
Man plans wedding, woman plans market,
children run in de street,
and den
de trumpet cut de breeze like lightning.

No one knows de hour,
no one knows de day.
Two men work side by side in de field,
one vanishes like smoke,
de other left wonderin'
why de breeze suddenly cold.

Lord, have mercy on we small souls.
We build our kingdom pon sand
and call it forever,
forgettin' You who form de coral,
You who teach de tide to rise and rest.

So come, O God of thunder and mercy,
shake de people who feel like islands,
wake de sleepers under de palm tree shade.
Let Your light burst like morning
over dis blue sea,
and when You come
find we not dancing' with idols,
but liftin' my eyes,
hands full of repentance,
hearts beating' like drums of Zion,
ready for de glory You bring.

Prayer

Lord of Creation and Life,
we come before you from every nation and tongue,
grateful for your sustaining love.
Keep us mindful of the shortness of our days and the precious gift of each moment.
Prepare our hearts for your coming not with empty celebration or distraction,
but with joy, humility, and grace.

Heavenly Babe of Bethlehem, be born anew within us.
During our chaos, bring your calm. In our weariness, breathe your strength.
In our fear, kindle hope.
Let peace rule in our hearts and guide our actions toward compassion and mercy.

May your light shine through our words and deeds,
that we may be instruments of healing and joy in a troubled world.
Come, Lord Jesus, dwell among us and within us, and make all things new.

Keron Khellawan
Doctor of Ministry, Class of 2025

Week 2 of Advent

Watch: God Is Remodeling Everything

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

On that day the Lord will again raise his hand to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel
and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. *Isaiah 11:1-12*

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. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." *Matthew 3:1-12*

Unceasing Movement

Isaiah's vision of a tender shoot rising from the long-fallen stump of Jesse reminds us that God is always at work in the hidden places. Even where life seems barren, God is nurturing new beginnings. John the Baptist's cry from the wilderness invites us to look inward, to turn away from what no longer brings life, and to clear space within our hearts for the renewing Spirit of Christ.[1]

God's movement has never ceased. It flows quietly and boldly through our world—through our communities, our churches, and our daily interactions. As ambassadors of Christ, we are called to keep watch: to look for hope, to work for justice, and to embody peace wherever God places us.

A worship song beautifully declares, "Dead things come alive in the name of Jesus." These words echo the very heart of Advent: nothing is beyond God's power to restore.[2]

Through prayer, we prepare ourselves for God's holy remodeling—spiritual, political, social, and personal. Christ makes all things new, reshaping what feels chaotic and breathing life into what seems beyond hope. Just as Jesus turned to prayer in moments of distress for strength and guidance, so we, too, enter this Advent season with prayerful hearts. We watch and we pray, trusting God to recharge, renew, and restore our hearts, minds, and spirits.

Prayer

Lord, you are the God of justice, love, and truth.
We cry out for your healing and restoring work through Christ's renewing grace.
Let your Holy Spirit move powerfully within us,
transforming our lives with your love, joy, and peace.
Make all things come alive again for Your glory.
In the mighty and powerful name of Jesus Christ.

Wilma Porter
Master of Arts in Theological Studies, Class of 2024
Alumni Coordinator

1 https://graceandpeacejoanne.com/2024/03/20/her-story-christs-ministry-the-wife-of-pilate/
2 https://aaregistry.org/poem/sweet-little-jesus-boy-by-robert-macgimsey/

A Burning Word for a Burning World

This is the situation. The Government is transitioning from a senatorial republic toward a thorough-going imperialism. Divine sanction is claimed by the imperialists. Litmus-tests of loyalty are wielded in ever-encroaching ways. A chasm has opened between the haves and the have-nots. Safety nets are shred. Local authority is superseded whenever the governing powers deem it necessary. At any hint of unrest, the army is deployed to keep putative "peace." Punishments can be harsh. Detention in deplorable conditions is common. Special coins, public spectacles, showy new edifices, military parades, all proclaim the greatness of the state and its exalted ruler.

I am speaking of course about the Roman Empire of Jesus' day. And in that world, Jesus was like a single thorn on an isolated briar-bush, bearing the sharpness of a Word and Spirit that ran counter to any power-based status quo, whether political or religious.

Shockingly, Jesus applied to himself the imagery of the arsonist! "I have come to cast fire upon the earth," he announced, "and how I wish it were already ablaze!" Well, thank the Lord, it's ablaze NOW! Such a refining fire burns indeed in the flame of every Advent candle. It shines forth in the Holy Birth, and right on through Epiphany. It remains a glowing ember during Lent. It rises to visibility again at Easter. It flares forth in the tongues of flame at Pentecost. And yes, may it blaze in our own hearts and souls and minds as well. Talk about a burning word for a burning world!

The prophet Isaiah, centuries before Jesus, proclaimed in his vision of a God-ordained peaceable kingdom that God "shall decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth." That is what we might call "Isaiah's Advent Vision." And that's the very sort of an Advent of divine justice and accountability that John the Baptizer was likewise proclaiming when he, as Jesus also would, pictured the refining fire of God—"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." And so, in recognition of such an unquenchable flame being kindled by God, may our candles of Christ's Advent be lit again to signify our faith in God's Spirit bending close to us anew, in order to blaze forth afresh in our ever-quaking world.

Prayer

Dear Lord of the divine Word and Way,
we pray that the fire of the Holy Spirit with which you are coming to baptize us
will be kindled anew in our minds and hearts during this Advent.
Illumine us with a hope rooted in faith.
Grant us your peace, and your love, and the genuine joy you want us to feel.
Inspire us to spread your inextinguishable light.
May your brightness flame forth in the darkness of these days.
Even so, come Lord Jesus!

A Rand Peabody
Master of Divinity, Class of 1971

Our Advent Watch

The Advent "Watch" reflects on the challenges faced by church communities, including racial inequities in the pews, economic difficulties as some Pastors sacrifice their salaries to keep the church doors open, social unrest in our families in our faith differences, and mental health issues in God's Church, emphasizing a sense of brokenness and a lack of reconciliation. It calls for vigilance during the Advent season to watch for God's remodeling and restoration through faith and hope, concluding with our ability to pray for guidance and gratitude in the spiritual journey.

When I journey in our church communities, I often sense a lack of reconciliation and care for God's People. Political announcements of hope become a faithless, dangerous message centered on turmoil in comparison to announcements of belonging to a God who wants to "remodel" our path of wilderness hopelessness. During a period when unemployment reaches its highest level, Health care is expensive, and housing remains unaffordable, and when stewardship giving is being questioned in our worship service, the announcement that God is remodeling everything brings hope.

In our wondering, how do we imagine that "God is remodeling everything" during a time when people who don't care about God as the center of hopeful joy are thriving? The tide of the Advent season is rushing quickly toward dangerous places before the Christmas Sunday message proclaims the Messianic Hope in a loving God and a time for repentance and restoration of our faith walk.

During this Advent season, let us watch for the Word of God as we listen to the Message of hope in our brokenness. Let us continue to put our hope and faith in calling on our Lord as our spiritual leaders did in the tradition of the ancients: "Precious Lord, take my hand."

Prayer

Dear Sovereign Lord,
help us to be thankful in our daily walk in the wilderness,
as we pray and praise you for our daily bread.
Thank you for the spirit of "watching"
as we wait for your Word to restore us to a humble approach of your grace.
In Jesus's name.

Micheal Edwards
Master of Divinity, Class of 1984

He Comes to Make Things Right

John the Baptizer has always been an enigmatic figure to me; hard to ignore, but even harder to figure out. I especially wonder about the lifestyle he chose. What was it that led this man to leave the comforts of home for a hippie existence in the Judean scrubland, wandering around dressed in a camel hair shirt and feasting on bugs and honey?

That's a head scratcher, although lately I've been wondering if may have had something to do with what we read in Isaiah 11: 1–11, words that the prophet initially addressed to people living in dire circumstances:

Look what's coming," says Isaiah or better, who's coming—someone who has what it takes to make things right. He will be infused with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and an overwhelming awe of the Creator. This man will accomplish things no one else has been able to do. He will lay low the narcissistic rulers who suck the life out of the people they are meant to serve. He will grant justice and relief to the oppressed. He will bring peace that goes beyond the mere cessation of conflict to reconciliation between warring parties. He will make things right."

It's a vision that is so startling in its delineation of an alternative reality that poetic imagery is necessary to convey it. Wolves lying down with lambs, bears with cows . . . Mind boggling stuff.

Could it be that this vision is at least one of the sources for John's dissociation with reality, particularly given his sense that his cousin, Jesus, was going to make it happen? Normal life loses its flavor when a radical transformation of "normal" is eminent.

This may be the reason John escaped into the wilderness. But it also brought him out to engage his neighbors with a call to repentance. That's the way this vision works: it makes us, or should make us, dis-satisfied with what is "normal", but also compels us to become participants in. The radical peace described here is something that we, as disciples of Jesus, should be making a great effort, as John did, to help put in place. If that's the future, how can we be satisfied with anything less?

Prayer

We have one prayer today, Lord; one thing we yearn for:
that Jesus may come into our lives
to give us both a taste of what is to come,
AND empower us to become participants in your plans for the future.
Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come!

John C. Hubers
Master of Divinity, 1982

Help! I Wrecked My Life

My wife and I enjoy watching HGTV shows. Recently even our young daughter has joined us in watching "Help! I Wrecked My House." Each episode shows individuals, often a couple, who attempt a home renovation on their own. Although they take on more than they can handle, they continue digging themselves into a hole until they finally admit professional help is needed. They reach out to Jasmine, the expert who patiently explains what they did incorrectly and completes the remodel with her team, often going above and beyond what the homeowners originally imagined.

This storyline is often similar to how we live our lives. We take on more than we can handle, but stubbornly keep pushing, thinking we can use our brilliance to tackle the problems before us. Of course, we usually won't admit our often-subtle sense of self-sufficiency, especially when doing things "for God." This is not to say our motives are necessarily prideful and evil; we may in fact be trying to impress God or earn God's love. When we act this way, however, we ignore the fact that God is remodeling everything; Christ's advent has inaugurated a major renovation. Though this reality has cosmic implications for all of creation, it is also deeply personal and affects how we serve those around us. In this season, we celebrate the coming of Christ and are reminded of how blessed we are not to need to rely on our own strength but instead participate in the work God is already doing.

Like John the Baptist's audience (Matthew 3:5-9), we are called to repent our sins and self-righteousness and are reminded of our need of Christ's redeeming work. The way we think about ourselves changes; not in a way that degrades our humanness, but one which recognizes our communion with the Creator. The way we act toward those around us changes: we pursue justice not to feel good about ourselves, but because it is an integral part of God's ongoing renovation (Isaiah 11:3-4). Only after this reorientation takes place can we faithfully be leaders in our communities for those God places in our care.

Which aspects of your life would benefit from calling in a professional who is more than willing to help us with our messes? How can the image of God's work as a renovation change the way you see yourself and act toward those around you?

Prayer

Lord, I thank you
that I don't have to fix my life on my own before coming to you.
I'm sorry for the times I have acted
as though my issues need to be tackled by my own grit and determination,
rather than asking for your wisdom and guidance.
We celebrate Christ's coming,
not merely as a historical reality but as a glorious step
in your work to transform our present reality beyond anything we are able to imagine. Help me to humbly, faithfully, and joyfully be a part of this work.

Ralph A. Almeida
Master of Divinity, Class of 2015

What's Stirring Inside You?

In Isaiah, the word dry ground describes a person from an unimportant place like the town of Nazareth. Matthew 3 presents the initiation of Jesus's ministry.

Psalm 19:14—"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer."

These words were the words King David wrote to God. What a rascal David had been in some parts of his life. But God said of him in the following verse, "When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes'" (Acts 13:22). David was said to have a heart like God's. The word "acceptable" is a keyword.

Have you ever turned in an assignment and the teacher said, "This work is unacceptable?" Forget about the grade; the teacher was probably telling you that you can do better. Jesus was at the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus had not yet completed his assignment of redeeming the human race. Yet his Father roared from heaven and said, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."

God could see the intention of his heart even before he accomplished his work on the earth. The meditation of his heart was acceptable even before his great act of redemption was accomplished.

Having right thoughts before God and our fellow brothers and sisters is of utmost importance to our Lord. "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Jesus's thoughts were acceptable.

Sometimes we are misread by people about our intentions and that's unfortunate, but our attitude can do more for us than even for others. If you have a good attitude about yourself, then you will be able to share those good things that are inside of you. May our thoughts and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to ourselves and then towards others.

Prayer

God who knows each of our hearts:
stir up inside us the desire to do better and be better,
that we may grow in your grace and share your boundless love.
We pray all theses things in the name of Christ,
your Son, our Savior.

Jesse Santiago
Master of Divinity student

Loud from the Wilderness

Loud from the wilderness a thrilling voice we hear.
"Repent, believe, the time has come. The Kingdom has come near."
He comes in deed and word. His advent is a gate.
"Prepare the way now for the Lord. His ways must be made straight."

Clad in a prophet's garb and fed on what he found,
yet city folk, sophisticates, this prophet did surround.
In Jordan's icy depths they plunged in faithfulness,
confessing sins and being cleansed lest they should be condemned.

"Flee from the wrath to come and bear repentance' fruit.
Do not presume your ancestry will do you any good.
For God can make right here a people all his own.
An axe is lying at the root, its edge is sharply honed."

One yet more powerful is coming after me.
With Holy Spirit and with fire his baptism will be.
The fork is in his hand, to winnow out the grain,
to gather wheat into his barn, the rest he will disdain."

Prayer

God who thunders in the wilderness,
help us to hear your call for wholeness,
to turn our lives around,
and to prepare your Way with thoughtful care, just actions, and faithful leadership,
that the world may see the power of your salvation.
We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ,
who gathers the fruitful and baptizes us with your Spirit and fire.

David Alexander
Master of Divinity, Class of 1980

Week 3 of Advent

Wait: God is imposing a new order

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.

Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God. He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;
then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp; the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.
No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. *Isaiah 35:1-10*

Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see?
Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and violent people take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. Let anyone with ears listen!

"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." *Matthew 11:1-19*

Patience

It was the morning after an election. As I opened my eyes, the first words that came to my mind were, "good morning, Jesus, thank you for waking me up". Anticipation that this new day could be the beginning of changes; a new order, a hope-filled future made my heart beat a little faster. Encouraging words, written by the Prophet Isaiah (35:1-10), are a profound reminder of the need for patience.

Always remember: God is at work in the silence, God is at work in the dark, God is at work in the stillness, listen for the song of the Lark. The night does not last forever, the sun will surely rise at the dawn, after the rain will come the rainbow. Wait, be patient, no need to be alarmed.

Prayer

Amazing and awesome God,
thank you for always working on our behalf.

Loraine A. Priestly-Smith
Master of Divinity, Class of 2007

If You Wait

Jesus did things, and John heard.
Then he sent folks with a word.
"Are you he who was to come,
or are you another one?"

Jesus answered, "go and tell,
what you see and hear as well.
Blind get sighted, lame can walk.
Deaf can hear and mute folks talk."

When that team departed, he
asked the crowd what they had seen.
"John was greater than a king,
priest, or preacher: anything.

He prepared a path and way
for what you can see today.
No one yet has been so great.
But you'll see some, just you wait."

Prayer

God, who calls us to see what you are doing among us
then calls others to see what we do in your name:
open our eyes and hearts to the wonder of your work in our midst,
that our awareness of your salvation may make us saviors to others in your name.
Help us show in our living how your love is more than the world expects.

David Alexander
Master of Divinity, Class of 1980

(If you would like to sing this devotion, go to Matthew 11:2-11 If You Wait)

The New Order

Matthew 11:1–9 reveals a moment of anticipation and reassurance as John the Baptist, imprisoned and questioning, sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He is truly the Messiah. Jesus responds not with force or political power but with signs of the kingdom where the blind see, the lame walk, and good news is preached to the poor. This points to a shift in kingdom-mindedness, rooted in grace and healing.

This passage signals a change from the old expectations of a conquering Messiah to the new reality Jesus brings from within. The old order emphasized law, power, and external appearances. In contrast, Jesus' ministry embodies a spiritual renewal restoring broken lives and bringing hope through love and mercy. Jesus affirms John's role as the forerunner yet invites us into the greater reality of His kingdom, which is one not of domination but of divine love.

This passage challenges how we perceive God's work today. Are we yearning for the old ways of power and control, or are we embracing the new order Jesus offers? We see around us situations of war and domination, but living in this kingdom requires a humble, childlike trust and a willingness to see God's work in unexpected places, not militant force or political domination.

Some things to think about:

- **Expect change over control:** Trust that God's kingdom is advancing through acts of mercy, healing, and grace, even when circumstances seem dark.
- **Embrace humility:** Like children, approach God with trust and openness, acknowledging our need for His grace rather than relying on self-sufficiency.
- **Look for signs of God's kingdom:** Be attentive to opportunities to serve, pray for the hurting, and share the good news amid festivities and life.
- **Live out the new order:** Demonstrate God's love in practical ways, reach out to the marginalized, forgive those who hurt you, and show mercy in your interactions.
- **Stay anchored in faith:** When doubts arise, remember Jesus' words about the signs of the kingdom and trust that God's promises are unfolding in His perfect timing.

This new order calls us to participate in God's ongoing work of renewal, embodying hope, grace, and humility each day. May we open our hearts fully to Jesus, trusting Him as the one who brings the new kingdom into our lives and the world around us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
In this Advent season of waiting and wonder,
we open our hearts to the new order You bring,
a kingdom where love overcomes fear,
justice lifts the lowly,
and peace takes root in every heart.

Teach us to prepare not only for Your coming,

but for your way so that we might live the compassion You designed,
serve with the humility You modelled,
and shine with the light You have given.

Come, Jesus Come. Renew the world. Renew us.

Keron Khellawan
Doctor of Ministry, 2025

Tikkun Olam and the Coming of Christ

The Jewish concept of "Tikkun Olam" intends to activate individual and communal faith towards "repairing the world." In a world that insists on systematically dehumanizing groups of people, Tikkun calls forth the ethical mandate for humanity to rehumanize others, to "to love one's neighbor as oneself." In the words of Libby Byrne, "to live close to the wounds,"

[1] through acts of social justice, compassion, and kindness.

As we approach the season of Advent, it is not a surprise to find the very embodiment of Tikkun in the life, work, and mission of Christ. The prophets first articulate the concept of Tikkun (Isaiah 61:1–2), and then Jesus himself voices his mission in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 4:16–21), using these very words of Isaiah.

Isaiah describes the one anointed by God's Spirit, whose purpose is one of social and spiritual healing. This mission is not one of political or military conquest or religious dogma but of restorative action: to "bring good news to the poor," "bind up the brokenhearted," and "proclaim liberty to the captives." This is a divine call for seeing, acknowledging, and mending wounds, addressing what has gone wrong and needs repair, no, *major* repair: poverty, grief, failure of the body, and injustice that have defined human suffering since the beginning

As recorded in Luke's Gospel, Jesus returns to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, unrolls the scroll of Isaiah, and reads Isaiah, in this exact spot. He then makes a stunning declaration: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In this pivotal moment, Jesus defines his own ministry as the embodiment and enactment of this prophesied repair. His mission is to *be* the agent of Tikkun Olam, repairing, healing the world.

Today, the teachings of Christ call us to ethical action: to act justly. Jesus came into this world as a child, grew up, then took up his mission: living close to the wounds of others. As followers of Christ, we too, are called to live close to the wounds of those in our sphere of influence. This is no passive faith, but rather a hands-on commitment to alleviating suffering, challenging injustice, and restoring wholeness to our communities and to the world.

Prayer

God who calls us to not only see but act:
help us live close to the wounds, with you,
that we may comfort the suffering
and repair the injustices of this world.
We pray this in the name of Christ, our wounded healer.

Charles M. Rix
Master of Arts in Theological Studies, Class of 2005
Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs

[1] Libby Byrne, "Living Close to the Wound," in *Tikkun Olam: To Mend the World: A Confluence of Theology and the Arts*, ed. Jason A Goroncy (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014), 98–112.

Week 4 of Advent

Welcome: God sends us outcasts and mysteries

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. *Isaiah 7:10-16*

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

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 1:1-25*

He Really Was a Somebody!

Have you seen the film "Nobody"? It and the sequel "Nobody 2" are action movies focused on an ordinary guy who, because of extreme circumstances, turns from ordinary to extraordinary! This storyline fits the experience of the unnamed innkeeper/hero of our first Christmas. Further, as we consider the Innkeeper's extraordinary circumstances and gracious response, we might call him the "Unnamed Hero of the First Christmas." Let's look at the narrative of that first Christmas and consider the Innkeeper's role.

First, consider the reasons behind calling him a "Nobody." It's kind of obvious, isn't it? Luke is the only Gospel Recorder who even mentions an innkeeper on that first Christmas Eve, but he doesn't provide a name or any details we would love to know. The other three Gospel Recorders? If they noticed an innkeeper was present, they didn't think it was worth mentioning. So, Nobody seems to be a well-deserved name for someone I would argue is responsible for the first act of grace and kindness within our Christian story.

How did I reach that conclusion? Let's start at Luke 2:1. Because of the census, all citizens returned to their family home, so the census would be as accurate as possible. How did that impact the family of Jesus? Simply stated, Mary, who was in the final hours of her pregnancy, was bumping down the road to Bethlehem, probably on a tired and uncooperative mule. Where would they stay? They had been talking about that ever since the unwanted trip was ordered. If there was a living relative in Bethlehem, they surely would have been there, but instead they were in a stable behind the inn because, as we know, there was no room in the inn. How could that mean innkeeper place a mother near birth in such a "lowly estate"? That's not the question! Rather, we should wonder how this innkeeper, who given the Roman occupation of Bethlehem probably lived at or near poverty level, give away a prime and likely last-available option to a family who had little, if any, cash to pay for this place of safety and comfort able to serve as a delivery room? The only logical answer is that this innkeeper saw the situation for what it was—a desperate moment for a tragically needy family—and responded with grace and caring!

Perfect it was not! But the Innkeeper gave his best and in so doing offered the first act of gracious kindness in our Christian tradition! And what do the Nobody's actions mean for us? Well, to use the words that the child born in that stable on the first Christmas would say years later: Be Somebody willing to "go and do likewise". Have a blessed Christmas, being someone!

Prayer

God who needed a borrowed womb and a borrowed birthplace:
help us to show such compassion
that lives are changed, even made possible.
Help us to become the grace in someone's story,
and help us make every day Christmas

Stephen Giordano
Master of Divinity, Class of 1976

What Is the Mystery?

What is your definition of Mystery? When I think of the word, I think of one of two things, a theme or genre for books, movies, games or something that happened, seen or unseen, that I am not able to explain. In this case, the mystery is something that can be explained as beautiful, miraculous, something that will change many people's lives.

We find the Creator asking Ahaz to request a deep sign, and Ahaz replies that he does not want to do so; he does not want to test his Creator. Then Isaiah speaks to the house of David: "Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also?" Isaiah goes on telling the king that the Creator would then give a sign. The prophet further tells them to look and see that a young girl who is pregnant with a child will give birth to a baby, and she shall name the baby Immanuel (Isaiah 7:10–14). Now thinking about what a mystery is, we can get an it is both a tangible thing for Ahaz to understand and a later assurance of the Messiah for all humankind. This explanation of the Mystery deepens as we go into the Gospel of Mathew.

In the first chapter of the Mathew the apostle writes that a couple named Mary and Joseph, who are not living together at the time, find out Mary is going to have a baby. Joseph, a law-abiding and good man, did not want to have people find out about Mary's situation and planned to divorce her quietly. Before Joseph could do this, he had a dream, and was told not to be afraid; Mary has been conceived by the Holy Spirit and the baby is to be named Jesus. The baby Jesus would one day save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:18–21). Having the big picture of what and who the mystery is, I hope it helps us to see the mystery as one of faith and something that also can change one's life spiritually.
Mysteries can be a genre of a book or game or movie, but let us remember in this case a mystery is an assurance of hope and deliverance that we may not be able to see or feel with our hands, but we may be able to sense.

Prayer

Creator of all things visible and invisible
Thank you for the mystery of your child
who came to save us all from our sins.
Help us share this mystery with others
in hopes that it helps change their lives as well.
We praise you and thank you for your many blessings.
May we always be grateful for this beautiful and Holy gift.
In your tender and loving name.

Ari Grow
Master of Divinity Student

Family Tree

Reading through Matthew 1 can feel like a slog as we stumble through the cast of characters Matthew trots out to trace Jesus' family tree back to Abraham. We may, in fact, be tempted to skip it altogether. But that would be a mistake, as it's essential to understanding the Big Reveal at the end. At the very least we should note that the list includes both well-known and little-known names: "somebodies" and "nobodies" (as per the way society defines us). Abraham is one of the "somebodies", revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims, despite his all too human short comings. But then there are folks like Jeconiah and Matthan and Azor whom we know next to nothing about. And what we do know isn't necessarily pretty. And that's not to mention others whose lives carry the stink of a scandal - like Tamar who seduced her father-in-law to get the sons she wanted and Solomon, who was the spawn of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

"Somebodies", "nobodies" and the morally compromised; it's the kind of family tree we all have which, I believe, is the reason Matthew included this as a preamble to his Big Reveal. He did it to show who it is Jesus came to save. That would be all of us.

The Big Reveal comes at the end of this passage with Matthew's recognition that Jesus is the Immanuel foretold by Isaiah: *God with us* not because of who we are but DESPITE who we are – "somebodies", "nobodies" and the morally compromised – all part of the broken human family he came to make right with God. And the good news, the really good news, is that that includes us.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come.

Prayer

Gracious God :
the Pharisee praised you in the Temple
because he considered himself above others; more pure, more righteous.
We know we aren't.
We, like that cast of characters in Jesus' family tree,
are not the people we should be or can be.
As we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth
may we be ready to recognize anew
how much we need Jesus to be our Immanuel.
May we be ready not only for his Second Coming,
but the First which allows him to take up residency in our lives.
Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come!

John Hubers
Master of Divinity, Class of 1982

Mysteries and Dreams

Growing up, I heard, 'God works in mysterious ways.' At the same time, I was cautioned against questioning those ways. They were to be accepted.

Perhaps one of the greatest mysteries is of a young maiden's conception of the promised Messiah through the presence of the Holy Spirit. A messenger brings this intriguing news, and it is accepted. Yet, the focus of the text is not on Mary's conception but Joseph's revelation through a dream.

Joseph, contracted to Mary, is mindful of her position. He considers dismissing her quietly from the marriage contract as he desires to do the right thing with her. As Joseph deliberates, the outcome hangs in the balance as a good mystery often does. While deliberating, Joseph is visited by a messenger in a dream.

Dreams are the unconscious meandering of one's thoughts. But this dream was different. It addressed the mystery. Joseph's message is to continue with Mary in her present state. Hers was a divine mission. Joseph's role in the mystery is to stand with Mary and give the child she carries the name, Jesus. Joseph's decision affirms the prophecy of Isaiah.

How prone are we to accept the mysteries of God? Do we trust the messenger of our dreams? Joseph did and, subsequently, welcomed the Messiah. In rehearsing the entrance of the Savior into the world, be reflective, take note of other mysteries and . . . dream.

Prayer

Gracious God,
how grateful we are that you set a plan in motion before the beginning of time.
Your Word became flesh through Mary
who surrendered her life in service to your plan.
May we listen today for the messenger's voice,
which continues to announce his glory
and open our hearts to receive his coming.
We pray in the name of your son and our savior.

Faye Taylor
Master of Divinity, Class of 2004
Assistant Professor of Spiritual Formation and Field Education

That First Christmas Night

Come with me, consider what that first Christmas night
held in store for one scared couple, desperate in their fright.
Imagine if, there on that stony stable ground
where heavy smells were ripe and rife with clay-stained hoofs around,
there was no gentle baby, nor a sweetly smiling maid,
but cold, poor, and exhausted on the musty hay they laid.

Come with me, consider what that first Christmas night
held in store for weathered shepherds, half-way seeking sight.
Imagine if, there on those lonesome, silent hills,
where wolves were feared and faced, and cold and vicious wind forced chills,
there was no host of heaven, nor an audible array,
but God relayed the message in an ordinary way.

Come with me, consider what that first Christmas night
held in store for three wise Magi, hardened in their flight.
Imagine if, there on their arid, torturous treks,
where camels spat and balked at ornate reins around their necks,
there was no magic star-shine, nor a covert, whispered clue,
but shrewd and sharp intelligence its own conclusions drew.

Come with me, consider what that first Christmas night
holds in store for all of us, God's children of the light.
Imagine if, here in this technocratic place,
where, though we dream, we question niggling inklings of God's grace,
there still is Holy Spirit, and our God still speaks of care.
Then Christ can show us miracles we never knew were there.

Prayer

Bless us and disturb us, O Christ.
Wrest us from our sleep and show us your true Light.
Let our hearts be changed by the wonder of your Love,
that we may go on our way rejoicing, sharing your Good News.

Kathleen Hart Brumm
Master of Divinity, Class of 1992

Christmas Prayers
Wonder

The first day of Christmas

Merciful and loving Creator,
that you would send such a tiny baby
to save generations upon generations of your people from sin
is a sign of how much you, God, can accomplish through love.
Help us, God, to say "Yes" to you with the faith of a young woman of marriageable age
—a person on the margins of society subject to scorn.
Help us, God, to say "Yes" to you with the strength of a young man
who regards not just his own reputation,
but the reputation and safety of a faithful girl.

We wonder, O God, how we would react to your blessings and decrees
if we had been tasked with the care of the babe.
Would we have been faithful enough to be brave with our "Yes?"
For our imperfect responses to your call, forgive us.
For your grace and mercy that forgives us, we praise your holy name.
For the holy family who took part in your story of redemption that brought forth a tiny baby,
our savior Jesus Christ,
we offer you unending thanks.

Jo Prout
MFCA Student

The second day of Christmas
(This is also St. Stephen's Day and the first night of Kwanzaa)

All creation and all the hosts of heaven join in praising you, O God,
and we join in those praises,
and we pray for the world you created,
especially those who are not safe or warm this Christmas . . .
and we pray for those who lay down their lives . . .
and we pray for those who lead us . . .
and we pray that you will use us as good neighbors and good stewards,
that our lives may proclaim, "Let the whole creation cry, 'Glory to the Lord on high!'"

The third day of Christmas

O Christ, the prophets foretold your coming,
the poor longed to see you.
The heavens celebrated your birth;
the apostles, the martyrs, and the faithful down though the ages
repeated the song of the angels.
Your church praises you in every human language,
for we have seen your salvation.
Son of God, you humbled yourself and became a servant,
raising us up to share in your glory.
We were in darkness and you have given us
light and strength, peace and joy.
Lead us according to your loving will;
make us a people who follow you in holiness.
Give us generous hearts to hear your Word,
spoken by apostles and prophets,
and produce in us abundant fruit, through the power of your Spirit. Amen.

The fourth day of Christmas

Through the gift of the holy babe, O God,
you offer us peace beyond our understanding.
This child, a root of Jesse, signals to us
that your promises are long and your vision is wide.
As you reclaim us, your people, we will blossom
like the bud whose delight is found in you, O Lord.
Through this helpless baby,
your justice rises and your faithfulness is expressed
in such profusion as the waters that cover the earth.
Gather us, Lord,
gather us to you as a mother gathers her child to her breast.

Guide us into repentance as we reflect on the gift of the child.
Do not cast us into the fire, Lord;
we need your guidance to bear fruit.
The child offers us the sweetness of honey,
of baptism with the Holy Spirit.
Reclaim us to blossom into the sweetness of salvation
promised and delivered with the birth of a tiny baby.
As we are reclaimed, remodeled, and nurtured,
lead us, O God, into a new creation
where peace and harmony are universal
and justice rolls down from mountains.

Jo Prout
MFCA Student

The fifth day of Christmas

We hear the Christmas bells,
calling us to celebrate joy and love and abundance.
We think of "peace on earth, good will to all,"
as a pleasant holiday greeting.
But we forget that
not everyone who hears those bells is safe and warm;
not everyone who hears those bells celebrates the coming of Christ;
not everyone who hears those bells is treated with good will.
Inspire us, O God, to answer the call of these bells as
a call to build systems of justice
and nurture kindness and decency,
showing the world you are not dead nor do you sleep.
May we work to assure the wrong will fail
and create the possibility for the right to prevail,
until Christ comes into every heart.

The sixth day of Christmas

O Christ, the prophets foretold your coming,
the poor longed to see you.
The heavens celebrated your birth;
the apostles, the martyrs, and the faithful down though the ages
repeated the song of the angels.
Your church praises you in every human language,
for we have seen your salvation.
Son of God, you humbled yourself and became a servant,
raising us up to share in your glory.
We were in darkness and you have given us
light and strength, peace and joy.
Lead us according to your loving will;
make us a people who follow you in holiness.
Give us generous hearts to hear your Word,
spoken by apostles and prophets,
and produce in us abundant fruit,
through the power of your Spirit. Amen.

The seventh day of Christmas
(this is also New Year's Eve)

As we celebrate this night,
cozy and warm with family and friends
or out in the crowds and lights and excitement,
let us be mindful of those who have no choice tonight:
those who must be out in the cold,
those who are frightened for what tomorrow will bring,
those who don't know if they will survive the night.
Show us the way to bring justice to more people.
Help us be a comfort to all those we meet.
Inspire us, not to long for a better year ahead,
but to build a better world today.
Hear our prayers in the name of Christ who comforts and challenges us.

The eighth day of Christmas
(this is also New Year's Day)

Emmanuel, God with us,
making your home in every culture and community on earth:
we thank you for raising up your servant Samuel Azariah
as the first indigenous bishop in India.
Bishop Azariah saw that
for the Church in India to grow and attract ordinary Indians to the Christian faith,
it had to have an indigenous leadership
and reduce the strong western influences that pervaded it.
On this day, the anniversary of his death on January 1, 1945,
let us celebrate how he championed the cause
to raise the educational standards for Indian clergy.
Grant that we may be strengthened by his witness to your love
without concern for class or caste,
and by his labors for the unity of the Church in India,
that people of many languages and cultures
might with one voice give you glory,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

T. Patrick Milas
Director, Gardner A. Sage Library

The ninth day of Christmas

We arise in this season, O God,
grateful for the light that is your blessing
fulfilled for us in the Christ child.
With the birth of Jesus, your glory has dawned.
Your radiance and your promised perfect presence now come to us
through the Light of the World.
We come to you unworthy and outcast, marginalized and afraid.

Your word reminds us that foreigners and unworthy shepherds
saw the blessed baby's star rise.
Like them, we, too, are overjoyed in the presence of the Light,
for whom we offer only ourselves,
having no earthly treasure great enough
for the majesty of the swaddled babe.
Such a newborn king shines brighter than all the beauty of this world.
We thank you for dreams that guide us to shelter and light,
and heavenly treasure and love.

Jo Prout
MFCA Student

The tenth day of Christmas

God of love,
our world encourages us to pursue power and money,
yet you come in weakness.
Our world encourages us to covet great material gifts,
yet you alone offer what is lasting.
Through the work of this Lord Jesus,
who comes among us full of grace and truth,
forgive us, heal us, correct us.
Then open our lips, that we may sing your praise with the angels,
and remake our lives, that we may witness to your transforming love,
through Christ, our Lord.

The eleventh day of Christmas

God, we know your Messiah has come, is coming, and will come,
and we must prepare.
We know your Messiah has come, is coming, and will come into our hearts,
but our hearts are not ready.
We know that we have sinned,
as individuals and as a society,
that we are destroying ourselves and one another
and all of your Creation.
We know that, for our world to be restored,
we must first be restored.
Let your Word pitch a tent in our hearts.
Let your promise be enfleshed in all of us.
Let all of us live into the promise to be your children.

The twelfth day of Christmas

God of infinite power and majesty,
who became finite and plain for us in an infant in a barn;
God whose face no one has ever seen,
who revealed your glory to unremarkable people who dared to watch and listen;
God on whom all our lives depend,
who for our sakes chose to become dependent upon us:
as your glory has filled us again this Christmas
and as your light gives us hope in a dark world,
give us the grace to carry that light and glory wherever we go,
to make your hope and grace real to everyone we meet,
and to share your light with others even as it has been shared among us,
that Christ may come alive, among us, through us, and especially in us,
to redeem our world for you, one life at a time,
wherever we may go.
Amen!

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