THE “O ANTIPHONS”

The earliest Christians observed the Jewish liturgical traditions to which they were accustomed and this was especially true with the Psalms, which were chanted or sung. By the 4th century these sung or chanted ‘antiphons’ were a part of the monastic life in what is today Syria and Palestine.

Pope Gregory the Great (540–604) known as “the Father of Christian worship,” revised the ancient chants into a ‘plainsong,’ a simple, often single tone melodic line that was without musical accompaniment. These antiphons became known as Gregorian Chants and are used throughout Christian worship all over the world.

There are different types of antiphons; those used in the procession, the presentation of the gifts, the Psalms, the alleluia, and at vespers. The Marian antiphons are sung seasonally, usually at the end of the day, and, in private practice, at bedtime. Many are familiar with Salve Regina, which is sung at the end of the Rosary.

The O Antiphons were a well-established practice in liturgical celebrations in Rome by the 8th century. They are sung or chanted during the last days of the Advent season, December 17-23. Each of the O Antiphons refers to a name or title for Christ, or refers to a prophecy of Isaiah for the coming of the Messiah.

The O Antiphons include;
- O Wisdom-Sapientia
- O Lord- Adonai
- O Root of Jesse- Radix Jesse
- O Key of David- Clavis David
- O Dayspring- Oriens
- O King of the Universe- Rex Gentium
- O With Us is God- Emmanuel

You may be familiar with “O come, O come, Emmanuel...” which we sing each Advent, usually at the beginning of mass. The song includes the line, “O come, O Dayspring from on high and cheer us by your drawing nigh...” Throughout Advent we hear the words in song, “Come, O hope of your people,” and “O Lord of Light,” “O Key of Knowledge,” “O promised love,” and “Come, O Morning: come O Light!”

In song we call to him, we implore him, we pray to him to come. Over and over again the words ring out for Jesus to hear us, to come to us, to set us free, to ‘open our lives to the light of your promise.’
We are a people in need of a savior, but we are reassured with the words, “Our light has come!”

So, as the days grow longer and the air turns cooler, let us take a cue from nature; go deep, be silent, make ready. Let the hustle and bustle of the commercial season fall around us like autumn leaves. Be still and wait for the coming of the Lord. Let the music of the Psalms ring in our ears as we celebrate the birth of our savior, “Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord. Today is born our savior, Christ the Lord.”

(Psalm 96)

November 24, 2019

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

First Reading 2nd Samuel 5:1-3

In those days, all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: "Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.’" When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD, and they anointed him king of Israel.

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5

I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the LORD." And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Second Reading Colossians 1:12-20

Brothers and sisters: Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the
firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.


The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

What does it mean to be a king? In the political or secular sense, we imagine it as someone who has ultimate power, wealth, and in some cases, wisdom. But in today’s readings we see a different view of what it is to be a king. King David is just and is ‘one of his people.’ They are connected by ‘bone and flesh,’ and David not only is their leader, but their shepherd.

In the 2nd reading from Colossians we see Jesus as Creator of “the visible and the invisible…before all things [and]…the head of the body, the church.” Jesus is King of the universe, the cosmos, and yet, he is our redeemer who has the power to forgive our sins. His kingship is not limited to a single dominion or principality. Then in today’s gospel, our savior-king is mocked and taunted. Even Pilate questioned Jesus, “Are you King of the Jews?” Jesus’ quiet response, “My kingdom does not belong to this world,” failed to give either Pilate, the Jewish leaders, or the Roman soldiers an answer they could comprehend.

Jesus radically redefined what it meant to be a king. Through his life, death, and resurrection he demonstrated for us that his kingship was
one of humble service, radical love, mercy, kindness, peace, and forgiveness. And most importantly, he asked us to do likewise. By accepting Christ, we become heirs to his kingdom. We are no longer our own, we are members of the Body of Christ.

In 1925 Pope Pius XI was disturbed by the winds of change in Europe. He saw worldly kings, despots, and charismatic leaders gaining favor and influence over the people, and in an effort to return the focus on Christ as the center of power, he instituted that the final day of Ordinary Time should be celebrated as Christ the King Sunday. He hoped that nations would accept the freedom of the Church, that all peoples and nations would respect Christ, and that all believers would endeavor to accept Christ as the King of their hearts, their minds, and their bodies.

It is fitting at this time of year and at this point in our cultural history that we renew our devotion to the King of mercy and love, who came first to us as an innocent and helpless child, who grew in love and wisdom, and sacrificed himself for us all without judgement. It is wonderfully true that “in him all things hold together.”

DECEMBER 1, 2019
The First Sunday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 2: 1-5

This is what 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 mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those who love you prosper! May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings.
Because of my brothers and friends I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the LORD, our God, I will pray for your good.

Second Reading  Romans 13: 11-14

Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to
awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first
believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw
off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct
ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not
in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the
Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

Gospel  Matthew 24: 37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the
flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in
marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know
until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the
coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will
be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the
mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake!
For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of
this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the
thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house
be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you
do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

This past April, just after 6:20 in the evening a fire broke out under
the roof of Notre Dame de Paris. Horrified people watched from the
streets of Paris as the fire quickly consumed the cathedral, destroying
the 13th century spire and much of the lead-covered roof. Television
sent the tragic scene to viewers around the world. As Parisians poured
into the streets to witness the tragedy, they, without prompting,
began to sing Ave Maria and Hail Mary. Some clutched their
rosaries. By the next morning the damage became clear. However, the
cathedral’s altar, two pipe organs, and three 13th century stained-glass
windows survived, including the iconic Rose Window. Miraculously,
Notre Dame’s own bee hive, including some 180,000 bees prevailed after becoming ‘smoke drunk’ and sleeping through the inferno. No one imagined the great cathedral would go up in flames. Some preparations had been made for such an event, but experts never expected the fire to break out in the attic. One day the church was one of the most popular tourist attractions of Paris, the next day, an object of great sadness.

Tragedy often comes unexpectedly. During this past summer no one thought as they shopped for school supplies that someone would target them because of their ethnicity. Nor could others have believed they might die as they partied downtown on a summer evening. And who could have dreamed that as they drove home or to the cinema on a hot, summer afternoon, they would be randomly marked for death. We make plans. We map out the future. We hope for the best, but no one has control of time or knows what is in store.

The gospel reminds us to ‘stay awake!’ and to keep our house and our lives in order. We should not live in fear or dread, but Jesus appeals to us to live in awareness, asking ourselves: How do we treat others? Do we share what we have with those less fortunate? Have we judged impatiently or harshly? Have we loved God with all our heart, mind, and soul?

If we heed the words of Isaiah, being instructed in God’s ways and walking in his paths, we have nothing to fear. The early Christians believed that Jesus would return within their lifetime and so Paul urged the people to live their lives with scrutiny. Today, two thousand years later we still wait in hope. As the smoke cleared at Notre Dame Cathedral, workers were amazed to see the altar and Nicolas Coustou’s Pieta relatively untouched. One bright shaft of daylight pierced the darkness and illuminated the altar and the gold cross behind it. Another beam of light lit the communion rail. The message was clear. Even after untold tragedy Christ is our light and our salvation.

DECEMBER 2, 2019
The First Monday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 4:2-6
On that day, The branch of the LORD will be luster and glory, and the fruit of the earth will be honor and splendor for the survivors of Israel. He who remains in Zion and he who is left in Jerusalem
Will be called holy: every one marked down for life in Jerusalem.
When the LORD washes away the filth of the daughters of Zion, And purges Jerusalem's blood from her midst with a blast of searing judgment, Then will the LORD create, over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her place of assembly, A smoking cloud by day and a light of flaming fire by night. For over all, the LORD's glory will be shelter and protection: shade from the parching heat of day, refuge and cover from storm and rain.

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings. Because of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you!" Because of the house of the LORD, our God, I will pray for your good.

Gospel Matthew 8: 5-11
When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." He said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion said in reply, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, 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."

Today a lone 90-year-old American Elm tree stands on a promontory at the Oklahoma City Memorial where in April, 1995 the Alfred Murrah Federal Building was bombed, killing 168 people including 19 children as they played and slept in the workplace daycare. The tree survived the blast but was scheduled to be cut down to retrieve evidence hanging from its branches. Survivors, workers, and first responders came together to save the tree and nurture it back to
health. Since the bombing, the tree has flourished, and seeds and cuttings have been shared with people around the country as a symbol of resilience, renewal, and rebirth. Likewise, a Callery Pear tree survived the September 11, 2001 attack in New York City. Today that tree blooms each spring, its pure white flowers a stark contrast to the steel and concrete of the urban megalopolis. Propagations from that tree now grow in memory of other tragedies – in Boston, Ft. Hood, Newtown, Connecticut, as well as sites where people lost their lives in wildfires, tornados, and hurricanes.

There is something about human resilience. There is something about the deep roots of faith that sustain us, just as the roots of the survivor trees weathered the onslaught of fire and ash, destruction and death. We rebuild after the utter destruction of natural disasters. We carry on, vowing to see that wicked killings never happen again after so many have had their lives cut short. God imubes us with an innate desire to look to the morning sun, to find optimism in the new leaf, and through it all to know that He loves us and will never abandon us. The centurion in Matthew’s gospel had faith in Jesus’ authority, in the power Jesus had to heal his servant. We often don’t fully understand how faith works, yet we know that without it we are left desolate, bereft, and without hope.

The prophet Isaiah steadfastly proclaims, “The Lord’s glory will shelter and protect us, offering shade from the parching heat of day, and refuge and cover from the storm and rain.”

DECEMBER 3, 2019
The First Tuesday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 11: 1-10

On that day, A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A Spirit of counsel and of strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt
upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. On that day, The root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, The Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

_Psalm 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17_

He shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;


Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

There is a story of a second-grade teacher who told her class one day, “Today class, you get to draw. You can draw anything you want.” So, the students gathered their Crayolas and paper and set about creating images of pets, houses, trucks, and birds. As the teacher moved slowly about the room examining their work in progress, she said to Bobby, “Is that your house? What a lovely place to live.” And to little Rebecca, “Is that your dog? What is his name?” When she approached Thomas, she wondered out loud, “What is that you are drawing?” Without hesitation he answered, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” The teacher smiled and said, “Now Thomas, you know that no one knows what
God looks like.” Thomas paused, lifting his crayon from the paper, looked at her and said, “Give me a minute and I’ll show you.” Some people seem gifted with insight. They see the world in clear, simple truths. The anointed One to whom Isaiah refers is like that; he has a spirit of wisdom and understanding, he possesses a spirit of counsel and strength, all the while possessing knowledge and fear (respect) of the Lord. He evenhandedly judges the poor, and he finds it not unusual that the calf rests with the young lion, that cows and bears reside near one another, and that the child who leads them suffers no harm from the cobra in his den. We could all take a lesson from this One whom the Gentiles seek out. If our faith is strong, we never doubt the gifts from the Lord: love, pity, protection, righteousness, and steadfastness.

The gospel reminds us that those who witnessed Jesus’ many works, who walked and ate with him, who knew him and loved him were especially blessed, yet many did not believe even as they beheld him in their own time. We, in the centuries that followed, did not see him, but have chosen to see in faith. We did not hear his voice, but we have hungered for his words.

DECEMBER 4, 2019
The First Wednesday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 25: 6-10a

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, The web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces; The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken. On that day it will be said: "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

Psalm 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I
walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side With your
rod and your staff that give me courage. You spread the table before
me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil; my cup
overflows. Goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

**Gospel**    **Matthew 15:29-37**

At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the
mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having
with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many
others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds
were amazed when they saw the mute speaking,
the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to
see, and they glorified the God of Israel. Jesus summoned his
disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for
they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat.
I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse
on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where could we ever get
enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus
said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied,
"and a few fish." He ordered the crowd to sit down on the
ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks,
broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave
them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up
the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

Today’s readings speak of abundance; the abundance of God’s love for
us, his mercy, and even the provisions he makes available for us
throughout the world – both in the ancient world and today. Isaiah
proclaims the Lord of hosts will provide for all people. David assures
that we will not want. And Jesus’ heart is moved with pity when he
sees the people tired and with nothing to eat. No one walks away
hungry from the Lord’s table. Jesus presides over the feast and seven
baskets are left over. God’s gifts are overflowing.

Yet today we hear that some 40 million Americans face hunger each
day, including more than 13 million children. How can this be in a
land of abundance? And could it be that we are starving for spiritual
food as much as physical nourishment?
Dolly Levi, the lead character in the musical Hello Dolly! says, “Life is a banquet, and most people are starving to death.” Often, when we are given too many choices and become lost in our own prosperity, we lose sight of the true nature of being fed, both spiritually and materially. In today’s gospel we are reminded that the people “ate and were satisfied.” They were given enough to share and so, to be blessed.

The United States has long been known as the ‘breadbasket of the world,’ growing enough winter wheat in Kansas, and spring wheat in North Dakota to provide bread for much of the world. Other regions of the world have learned from us and now they too, grow rice, soybeans, and other grain crops that can sustain the world population. God calls us to share. He invites us to the feast equally. No one need hoard the bounty if everyone is satisfied.

In the developing world these lessons are being learned slowly. Individual farmers must eke out a living while in competition with huge, multi-national conglomerates who threaten the small farmer’s existence, as well as the quality of the land. Yet, private farmers, many of whom are women, work small patches of land and sustain modest herds. Ester winnows soybeans in Rwanda. She shares seeds with her family and gets training from The Acre Fund. Berbera grows sheep and goats in Somalia, and Ajiem scavenges for awieo, an edible shrub in Ethiopia. Mary harvests maize in Rwanda, and Lulunda grows sugarcane in Mozambique. They grow what they need, share what they can, and all feel blessed with what they have. How could seven loaves of bread and a few fish feed such a multitude? We are given a great bounty. We must bless the fullness of our gifts, be grateful, share, then be satisfied.

DECEMBER 5, 2019
The First Thursday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 26: 1-6

On that day they will sing this song in the land of Judah: "A strong city have we; he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us. Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just, one that keeps faith. A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace; in peace, for its trust in you." Trust in the LORD forever! For the LORD is an eternal Rock. He humbles those in high places, and the lofty city he brings down;
He tumbles it to the ground, levels it with the dust.  
It is trampled underfoot by the needy, by the footsteps of the poor.

Psalm 118: 1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.  
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

Gospel Matthew 7: 21, 24-27
Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Everyone who listens to 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 buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

We often sing Psalm 118 at mass but we may recognize it better as; "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice, let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be glad." But frequently our joy gives way to fear...fear of getting cancer, of having no money, of losing our job, and countless worries for our children and loved ones. We often are anxious over trivial things too, and as scripture tells us, no single worry will lengthen our lives by one day. It is good advice to worry only for those things that we can do something about and let the other uncertainties just fall away. Few of us are that pragmatic.

Jesus’ parable of the wise man’s house built on rock and the fool’s house built on sand reminds us of the devastating hurricanes of recent years. Residents in the wake of Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Dorian are still trying to put their lives and homes back together. It feels as though Mother Nature is merciless, leveling neighborhoods of the rich as well as the poor, breaking the hearts of the innocent and the wicked alike.

But the psalmist and the prophet Isaiah give us words of comfort. "Trust in the Lord forever!" and "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever." Jesus surely gives us good
construction advice, but his clear intention is to instruct us to build our faith on the rock of God. He is our only refuge in the storm that tests us, be it wind or weather, illness or adversity, anguish or torment. Sadness and loss come in all forms, and the heaviness of the blow can send us reeling, searching for a light in the storm's darkness. In Jesus’ parable the house is completely ruined, but the fool can be redeemed. Take refuge in the Lord. Build your faith on firm foundation and trust that you will weather the storm.

DECEMBER 6, 2019
The First Friday of Advent
First Reading  Isaiah 29: 17-24
Thus says the Lord GOD: But a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard, and the orchard be regarded as a forest! On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book; And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see. The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD, and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant will be no more and the arrogant will have gone; All who are alert to do evil will be cut off, those whose mere word condemns a man, Who ensnare his defender at the gate, and leave the just man with an empty claim. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham: Now Jacob shall have nothing to be ashamed of, nor shall his face grow pale. When his children see the work of my hands in his midst, They shall keep my name holy; they shall reverence the Holy One of Jacob, and be in awe of the God of Israel. Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding, and those who find fault shall receive instruction.

Psalm 27: 1, 4, 13-14
The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid? One thing I ask of the LORD; this I seek: To dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD and contemplate his temple.
As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread word of him through all that land.

There are two musical versions of Psalm 27. The refrain of one is, "I believe I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living," and the second, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom should I be afraid, of whom should I be afraid?" David’s sacred song depicts light, goodness and salvation. We have nothing to fear. The words of the 23rd Psalm are echoed here, as well, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Goodness and mercy follow me wherever I go and my desire is to dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

The two blind men who followed Jesus knew well the songs of David, the shepherd boy. Though they could not see, they knew Jesus as the "son of David," and they knew he had the power to heal them. In Psalm 27:7 the psalmist sings, "When I cry out, O Lord, hear my voice! Have mercy on me and answer. My heart has told me, ‘seek his face!’ It is your face, Lord, I seek.”

The blind men seek restoration of their sight and the first thing they see is Jesus’ face. What a vision that must have been for them! We don’t know from this reading if the men were blind from birth or as a result of some illness or accident in adulthood. Whatever the cause, imagine their joy and wonder as they opened their eyes and beheld Jesus. Did they touch his face? Did they thank him for their miracle? Perhaps in their excitement they didn’t hear Jesus’ warning not to spread word of him, for we are told they went throughout the land telling their miraculous story. And who could blame them? Their sight was restored. They had seen the Messiah.
DECEMBER 7, 2019
The First Saturday of Advent
First Reading  Isaiah 30: 19-21, 23-26

Thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem, no more will you weep; He will be gracious to you when you cry out, as soon as he hears he will answer you. The Lord will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst. No longer will your Teacher hide himself, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher, While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: "This is the way; walk in it," when you would turn to the right or to the left. He will give rain for the seed that you sow in the ground, And the wheat that the soil produces will be rich and abundant. On that day your flock will be given pasture and the lamb will graze in spacious meadows; The oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat silage tossed to them with shovel and pitchfork. Upon every high mountain and lofty hill there will be streams of running water. On the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall, The light of the moon will be like that of the sun and the light of the sun will be seven times greater like the light of seven days. On the day the LORD binds up the wounds of his people, he will heal the bruises left by his blows.

Psalm 147: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Praise the LORD, for he is good; sing praise to our God, for he is gracious; it is fitting to praise him. The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; the dispersed of Israel he gathers. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He tells the number of the stars; he calls each by name. Great is our LORD and mighty in power: to his wisdom there is no limit. The LORD sustains the lowly; the wicked he casts to the ground.

Gospel  Matthew 9: 35-10: 1, 5a, 6-8

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest
to send out laborers for his harvest.” Then he summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus, "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."

At the opening (and conclusion) of the iconic film, *Citizen Kane* we hear the last words of the man himself: “Rosebud.” And so begins the search for the meaning of that simple word. Was it a secret lover? Was it some sort of code for how he was able to amass his great wealth? What did it mean? At one time Charles Foster Kane was one of the richest men in the world. He had almost as much power and influence as he had money, yet happiness, peace of mind, and loving relationships evaded him his entire life. Here was a man who seemingly had everything anyone could want, and if he didn’t have it, he could send someone to get it for him. However, Kane suffered. He suffered from loneliness, selfishness, greed, and what the ancient Greeks called *hubris*, or pride.

Although most of us will never share the sins of Citizen Kane, certainly not to the degree he did, we do, from time to time exhibit our own form of selfishness, pride, greed, or anger. We are human, after all!

Today’s gospel reminds us that there is much work to do to end suffering in the world. At times the tasks of feeding the poor, helping the homeless, and comforting the displaced feels overwhelming. How can I make a difference in the face of such need? But Jesus shows us that doing nothing is not an option. He responded with action all the way to his death on a cross. God is the source of every good gift, and together we can work to end hunger, disease, homelessness, and war. We are called to be good stewards for one another and for the world with all its resources bestowed within it. We are the laborers that Jesus refers to when calling for a harvest of mercy, unselfishness, compassion, and love. We are the workers of his fields, the shepherds of his flocks. Isaiah beckons us to hear the voice, “This is the way; walk in it.” The God of creation gives us seed to plant, rain to nourish the soil, all others things we need. Now our job is to work together to share the harvest of such bounty.
If only Citizen Kane had shared his prosperity, he could have made a lasting difference in the lives of many people. Instead, in his last moments, he only recalled the name of his favorite childhood toy, a simple snow sled named, ‘Rosebud.’

DECEMBER 8, 2019
The Second Sunday of Advent
First Reading  Isaiah 11: 1-10

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Psalm 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace, till the moon be no more. May he rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save.

Second Reading  Romans 15: 4-9

Brothers and sisters: Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the
Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name.

Gospel Matthew 3: 1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies 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 am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Thomas Merton was a French-born, American priest and Trappist monk. His fellow monks called him, Father Louis, and the last years of his life he spent as a hermit in the woods near his abbey in Kentucky, living in a small, simple cinder-block building. He rose
each day around 3:15 to begin his prayers. He cooked his own meals on a small portable stove, and he hauled his own water. It is a wonder that we have even heard of him, yet his life is a paradox. He lived simply, quietly, often taking a vow of silence. But he became world known for his writings – letters, books, and poetry calling us to love and compassion. At the time of his death he possessed only a Timex watch, a pair of dark glasses, two pairs of bifocal glasses, two leather bound breviaries, one broken rosary, and a small icon of the Virgin and Child.

When I think of Merton and others like him, I am reminded of John the Baptist. He owned little, residing in caves and outposts. Here was one ‘crying out in the desert,’ a man who knew his place in the world, who was not afraid to unsettle and even frighten people with his message. John could have easily passed into history unknown and unnamed. Many zealots of the time were considered more a nuisance than a real threat. But John was different.

John believed in the ‘now.’ He was sure that the end of times was in his lifetime and that Jesus was the Messiah. No wonder his words had such urgency and insistence. Many believed that John was in fact the prophet Elijah. His strange clothing and ascetic lifestyle mirrored that of Samson, Samuel, and Elijah, prophets of the Old Testament tradition. And John was born into a priestly line. John’s faith never wavered, even to the surety of his death.

Like many wise men of olden days and the present time, the message is difficult to hear. We want to turn away from their forceful words and brash personalities. But so often they are right. They see a catastrophic crooked path ahead and they admonish us to make it straight before it is too late.

**DECEMBER 9, 2019**

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

First Reading  **Genesis 3: 9-15, 20**

After the man, Adam, had eaten of the tree, the LORD God called to the man and asked him, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.” Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!” The man replied, “The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit
from the tree, and so I ate it.” The LORD God then asked the woman, “Why did you do such a thing?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you shall be banned from all the animals and from all the wild creatures; on your belly shall you crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.” The man called his wife Eve, because she became the mother of all the living.

Psalm 98: 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4
Sing to the Lord a new song, for he had done marvelous deeds; his right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm.

Second Reading  Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12
Brothers and sisters: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of
Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Recently I came across an old copy of a TIME magazine in which the title article was, ‘The 100 Most Influential People of 2006.’ I admit I didn’t know most of the people on the list. Even the president wasn’t on the list that year. Many have died since that publication and others are still doing their creative and innovative work in the arts, industry, medicine, and world affairs. But it made me wonder, “Who would be on the list today? And who would have made the list during Jesus’ lifetime?” Human success, power, influence, and fame is fleeting. It howls like the wind, and then it is gone forever.

A contemporary list might include business magnates, political leaders, pacesetters and trendsetters in the arts and sciences, and also a new set of prominent people called, ‘influencers.’ Influencers market their clothes, make-up, and lifestyle on social media, and they are paid to be seen using certain products. Some are as young as ten. And you probably don’t even know their names.

Who would make the list during the first century? Probably not the angel Gabriel, nor Mary or Joseph. Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin certainly would not be an influencer. Caligula and Nero would probably head the list. Emperors and kings are admired and feared for their power and notoriety. Herod the Great and philosopher Josephus might make the top ten, as well as Pliny the Elder, the poet Statius, and Agrippina, the mother of Nero. But what do we think of them today? We remember their brutality, their seeming lack of respect for human life. We remember their words. We remember the wars they fought, and the cities they desecrated.

But somewhere – certainly down on the list – would appear three names: John the Baptist, Jesus the Christ, and St. Paul. These men changed the world, and not in the sense of land boundaries, accumulation of wealth, or the size of their armies. These men,
through their words, actions, lives, and deaths brought about the most significant and earth-shattering change in the history of the world – and they did it with love. As Paul says to the Ephesians, God chose us in Christ “to be holy and without blemish....In love he destined us for adoption...” These men needed no army, no weapons, no power over men other than faith in the Holy Spirit and the God of all creation. Sometimes one man can make a difference. All things can be made new, as Mary modeled so beautifully in her response to Gabriel: “May it be done to me according to your word.”

DECEMBER 10, 2019
The Second Tuesday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 40: 1-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; Indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. A voice says, "Cry out!" I answer, "What shall I cry out?" "All flesh is grass, and all their glory like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower wilts, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it. So then, the people is the grass. Though the grass withers and the flower wilts, the word of our God stands forever." Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; Cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, Carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.
Psalm 96: 1-2, 3, 10 ac, 11-12, 13

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands. Sing to the LORD; bless his name; announce his salvation, day after day.

Gospel Matthew 18: 12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: "What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

In one of the most beloved episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*, Andy's son, Opie, accidentally kills a mother bird with his new slingshot. Opie was warned by his father not to shoot at any living thing, but he can't wait to test out his new toy and so he aims at the first thing he sees moving. Andy finds the dead bird in the front yard and knows Opie has killed it from his son's guilty behavior. Opie hears the plaintive chirping of the hungry baby birds and realizes that now they are without a mother and facing certain death. Andy helps Opie understand that he must now mother the orphaned birds, feed them, provide water and shelter, and help them to fledge and fly away on their own. Opie accepts the task and names the birds, Winkin', Blinkin', and Nod. The day comes when the little birds are ready to fly and be sent back into the wild. Both Andy and Opie watch with some trepidation and sadness to see them go. Finally, after all three have taken to the wind, Opie remarks how lonely and empty the cage seems without the birds. "Yes, son, it sure does," Andy replies. "But don't the trees seem nice and full."

What a wonderful father figure! He is patient, kind, forgiving, and wise. In today's gospel Jesus demonstrates the need to care for the lost, the rejected, and the wayward one. He never gives up on us, always ready to rejoice at the steps we take in the right direction.

Baby birds. Impulsive children. Prideful sinners. We all need someone to look out for us; to love us enough not only to forgive, but to have confidence that we will find our way, eventually.
DECEMBER 11, 2019
The Second Wednesday of Advent
First Reading  Isaiah 40: 25-31

To whom can you liken me as an equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things: He leads out their army and numbers them, calling them all by name. By his great might and the strength of his power not one of them is missing! Why, O Jacob, do you say, and declare, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know or have you not heard? The LORD is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny. He gives strength to the fainting; for the weak he makes vigor abound. Though young men faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall, They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.

Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Gospel  Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said to the crowds: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Matthew’s gospel makes it sound so easy. “Come to me,” and you will find comfort and rest. But can it be this easy? We all have felt weariness; weariness of the soul, physical fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. Whether we are 16 or 60, emotional heartbreak, the stresses of modern life, and the consequence of sin can lead the best of us to feel discouraged, as though we have the ‘weight of the world on our shoulders.’ Yet Jesus says in the simplest terms, “Come to me.”

Fr. Richard Rohr, founding director of the Center for Action and Contemplation writes; “The spiritual life is not static. You will come to a crisis in your life, and after the crisis, if you are open to it, you
will enter a space of spiritual refreshment, peace and compassion that you could not have imagined before.” He calls the crisis ‘a kind of falling,’ and it might be related to your job, a death, a sudden illness, a divorce, some life event that calls into question your spiritual life as you have lived it, and perhaps your life itself. Where no answer can be found, when all hope seems to vanish, we can only ‘fall upward’ into the arms of the Lord. Jesus consoles us with his words, “Come to me....and learn from me.” His burden is light and he is meek. All loads are easier to bear when you have help, someone to share the weight, someone to ease the heaviness. As Isaiah describes, with the help of the Lord you will not grow faint. You will not stumble. Proverbs reassures and echoes Jesus’ words, “You will find rest for your souls,” and in 1st Peter the apostle writes; “Come to me and cast your anxieties on me, for I care about you.” When the load is too heavy, when you have fallen to your knees and wonder if you can ever get up again, do not despair. Lift your eyes and your heart to the Lord. He is standing right in front of you with open arms, ready to share the yoke and give you hope.

DECEMBER 12, 2019
The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
First Reading  Zechariah 2: 14-17
Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the LORD. Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they shall be his people, and he will dwell among you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. The LORD will possess Judah as his portion in the holy land, and he will again choose Jerusalem. Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the LORD! For he stirs forth from his holy dwelling.

Psalm Judith 13: 18 b, c, d, e, 19
Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all the women on earth; and blessed be the LORD God, the creator of heaven and earth.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Mary left her home to visit her “spiritual mother,” Elizabeth. Our Lady of Guadalupe identified herself as mother of an entire culture of people. I was blessed to have an older woman in my life whom I knew from my mid-teens until I was well into my 50s. I first met her when I attended summer camp where she and her husband were directors. She was inspirational to generations of little girls and we all knew her as a woman of great faith, wisdom, and happiness. Her elderly mother lived there on the camp grounds, and we loved to visit ‘Granny’ and listen to her stories of crossing the prairie in a Conestoga wagon and of chopping off the end of her big toe while mowing the yard with a push mower at age 92. We even watched hummingbirds settle on her shoulder. Often Granny would tell us, “Every time my daughter comes to visit me, it is just like Christmas.” Not too many of us could say the same about our relationship with our mothers.
These two humble women taught us about prayer, moral courage, respect for nature, and devotion to the cause of being a woman in the most gracious, genteel, and honest way.

Recently, I read Margaret Renkl’s new memoir, *Late Migrations*, which tells of growing up in the rural South, of facing loss, and of her beloved imperfect family. In it she pays homage to all our mothers: “Blessed is the weary mother who rises before daybreak for no project or prayer book, for no reason but the solace of a sleeping house and a tepid cup of instant coffee and a fat dog curled on her lap. Hers is the fleeting kingdom of heaven. Blessed is the farm-born mother, gripped by a longing for homegrown tomatoes, who nails old roller skates to the bottom of a wooden pallet, installs barrels of soil and seeds on top, and twice a day tows it through the grass to the bright spots, following slivers of sun across the shady yard. She shall taste God.

Blessed is the mother whose laugh is a carillon, a choir, an intoxication filling every room in the house and every dollar-movie theater and every school-play performance, even when no one else gets the joke. She will be called a child of God. Blessed is the mother who arrives at the school pickup line wearing pink plastic curlers and stained house shoes, and who won’t hesitate to get out of the car if she must. She will never be kept waiting. Blessed are the mothers whose final words on leaving—the house, the car, the least consequential phone call—are always ‘I love you.’ They will leave behind children who are lost and still found, broken and, somehow still whole.”

**DECEMBER 13, 2019**

**The Second Friday of Advent**

**First Reading  Isaiah 48: 17-19**

Thus says the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea; Your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, Their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence.
Psalm 1: 1-2, 3, 4, and 6

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked
Nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, But delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night.

Gospel Matthew 11: 16-19
Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by her works."

The crowd in today's gospel reminds me of the children's tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Goldilocks takes a walk in the forest, finds an inviting house, and after knocking to no answer, she enters where she finds porridge on the table, a nice big chair, and an empty bed. The first bowl is 'too hot,' the second is 'too cold,' and the third is 'just right.' The little girl has a similar experience with the chair and the bed. We are all looking for that 'sweet spot,' that thing that is 'just right.' The people of Jesus' day were not different. Some wanted a messiah who would vanquish the Romans with might and dread.

Those same people were displeased with John because of his incessant call to fasting and repentance. Too hot or too cold – aren't we all at times looking for a savior who will make it easy for us and be the kind of anointed one we envision? John's call for atonement made people uncomfortable. His vision of the kingdom asked for too much from them. Jesus on the other hand came to celebrate the kingdom like a wedding feast, and for many his emphasis on love, forgiveness, and service could not be imagined in a world of such inequality and discrimination. John was 'too hot' and Jesus was 'too cold.'

Isaiah pleads on the part of God, "If only you would see what is true and good, your life and descendants would be innumerable." We can be blind to the truth that stands right in front of us. We can get our priorities mixed up. We can convince ourselves that sometimes siding with the devil will be good in the end. But the story of our salvation
consists in God loving us in spite of our foolishness, blindness, selfishness, and destructiveness. John was a social and moral critic, a wilderness prophet. Jesus was an ambassador for God, a missionary for peace and love. Let us not be like Goldilocks who ran away when she was found out. Let us bravely stand our ground, proclaim that Jesus is Lord and that in all ways and all cases, he is ‘just right.’

DECEMBER 14, 2019
The Second Saturday of Advent
First Reading Sirach 48: 1-4, 9-11
In those days, like a fire there appeared the prophet Elijah whose words were as a flaming furnace. Their staff of bread he shattered, in his zeal he reduced them to straits; By the Lord’s word he shut up the heavens and three times brought down fire. How awesome are you, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Whose glory is equal to yours? You were taken aloft in a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with fiery horses. You were destined, it is written, in time to come to put an end to wrath before the day of the LORD, To turn back the hearts of fathers toward their sons, and to re-establish the tribes of Jacob. Blessed is he who shall have seen you and who falls asleep in your friendship.

Psalm 80: 2 ac, 3b, 15-16, 18-19
Once again, O LORD of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; Take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Gospel Matthew 17: 9a, 10-13
As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.
When you look at the life of Elijah it is clear to see why the first century Hebrews believed that John (or even Jesus) was the return of the Old Testament prophet. Elijah was a formidable character. His name, translated into Hebrew means ‘My God is Yahweh.’ Elijah was known for openly worshipping his God over the Canaanite deity, Baal. He also was a miracle worker, the first one in scripture to resurrect someone from the dead. In First Kings 17: 32 he encounters the widow of Zarephath, a poor woman with only one son. Elijah promises her that God will not let her flour or oil run out even though everyone in the countryside is facing a deadly drought and have little to eat. Not long after, her son dies and, at first, she blames Elijah. Finally, as Elijah calls out to God, her son is restored to life. In First Kings 19: 11-13 Elijah himself encounters God, not in the winds of a storm, not in earthquake, and not in the inferno. He experiences God in the ‘still, small voice.’ Of course, the ancient Hebrews wanted a savior with the awesome power of an Elijah! John spoke with a fiery voice, just as Elijah brought down fire from the sky. And Jesus became the still, silent voice of God that lovingly entered the hearts of those in his own time, and ours.

DECEMBER 15, 2019
The Third Sunday of Advent
First Reading   Isaiah 35: 1-6 a, 10
The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing. Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.
Psalm 146: 6-7, 8-9, 9-10
The LORD gives sight to the blind; the LORD raises up those who were bowed down. The LORD loves the just; the LORD protects strangers.

Second Reading  James 5:7-10
Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Gospel  Matthew 11:2-11
When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why 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: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you. Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Each summer of my youth I packed my bags, left the big city, and went to my grandparent’s farm in the piney woods of northeast Texas. There surrounded by tall trees, pastures filled with knee-deep
Bermuda grass, and the limitless patience and love of my grandparents, I learned to spit watermelon seeds, bottle-nurse an orphaned calf, pick wild blackberries, and talk to an old bird dog named ‘Boy.’ In those idyllic days I believed that life was simple and ordered, and that everyone and everything would last forever. Eventually a time came when I no longer went to the farm. I grew up, went to college, and became wiser to the world. My grandparents passed away and I seldom visited. But the memories of those summer days have not faded. Years ago, on a cold, winter night not long after midnight their house went up in flames. Some said it was itinerants carelessly discarding a cigarette. Others said it was lightning, though no one recalls a storm that particular night. I think the old empty house went ablaze all by itself. The heat created by all those memories, all that love sparked spontaneous combustion. My grandfather used to tell me how a barn full of damp hay could catch fire suddenly because there was no room for all that heat so it just burst into flames. Summers and winters, birthdays and Christmases, it was as though the house saved up all that fever until one day there weren’t any people there to take out the warmth in the living of their lives, and so it was gone. All those memories stayed in that house until there was nothing left but glowing embers—except in the hearts and minds of those who had lived there, loved there.

One spring, not too many years after the fire, something wondrous occurred. A dense blanket of bluebonnets bloomed where the old house stood. Like the color of the sky or the blue gingham dresses little girls used to wear, the sapphire flowers defined the layout of the house. No one recalls seeing bluebonnets in that part of town. No one spread seeds to cover the barren earth. Perhaps the heat of the house fire raised dormant seeds to life. That little patch of ground needed something cheery to grace its emptiness and be a sign of the renewal of life. Now each spring there is a testament to Isaiah’s words that the, ‘steppe will rejoice and bloom...with abundant flowers.’ And ‘fear not,’ for the love of God goes beyond time and place, life and death. Surely the messenger of God’s sustaining love speaks in many different ways.
When Balaam raised his eyes and saw Israel encamped, tribe by tribe, the spirit of God came upon him, and he gave voice to his oracle: The utterance of Balaam, son of Beor, the utterance of a man whose eye is true, The utterance of one who hears what God says, and knows what the Most High knows, Of one who sees what the Almighty sees, enraptured, and with eyes unveiled: How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your encampments, O Israel! They are like gardens beside a stream, like the cedars planted by the LORD. His wells shall yield free-flowing waters, he shall have the sea within reach; His king shall rise higher, and his royalty shall be exalted. Then Balaam gave voice to his oracle: The utterance of Balaam, son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eye is true, The utterance of one who hears what God says, and knows what the Most High knows, Of one who sees what the Almighty sees, enraptured, and with eyes unveiled. I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a staff shall rise from Israel.

Psalm 25: 4-5 a, b, 6-7 b, c, 8-9
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

Gospel Matthew 21: 23-27
When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them in reply, "I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. Where was John's baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?" They discussed this among themselves and said, "If we say 'Of heavenly origin,' he will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we fear the crowd, for they all regard John as a prophet." So they said to Jesus in reply, "We do not know." He himself said to them, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things."
I lived in Colorado for a year in 1979 while I was doing graduate studies. Often, when the assigned readings and research papers got to me, I headed out into the mountains to clear my head and delight in the natural beauty of the Rocky Mountain foothills. Occasionally, my drive took me down highway 93 between Golden and Boulder. Along that straight and isolated road, I passed the entrance to the Rocky Flats Plant, a US complex that produced nuclear weapons parts, primarily plutonium pits used in assembling the arms. This was a scary time in world affairs. The Cold War was raging, the Soviet Union was the ‘evil empire,’ and the Berlin Wall still stood. Iran had just taken 52 Americans hostages, so everyone was on edge fearing nuclear Armageddon. In the midst of the televised political turmoil, I found peace on these drives. On many occasions as I passed the plant entrance, I noticed a lone figure, a Buddhist monk sitting cross-legged and completely still except for the rhythmic beating of a small two-headed drum with a handheld stick. His robes were saffron and white and one shoulder was exposed. No matter the weather he sat there, silent, almost motionless beating his drum and praying for peace. In winter the chinook winds blustered down from the mountains at 40-50 mph. In spring the rains gusted in a straight-line pattern across the prairie that bordered the mountains. Still he sat there, beating his drum, praying for peace. It was his calling. It was his mission. It was his way of preparing the way, and serving his god.

I found out in a news report that his name was Rev. Ketsuzo Sawnda and that he walked eight miles 2-3 times a week to the Rocky Flats gate. His few possessions included a 100 lb. tepee, and his two-headed drum.

People thought he was a weirdo, or crazy. “What kind of a person would sit out in all sorts of weather to just bang on a drum?” people would say. “What is he accomplishing anyway?” they questioned. Certainly, first century Romans and Hebrews said the same of John the Baptist. He wore strange clothes in all sorts of weather. He proclaimed a demanding message and held a mirror to society challenging them to change their ways and review their transgressions to man and God.

How many times have we disregarded a prophet because we were uncomfortable with his/her message? How often have we scorned someone for their utmost commitment to an idea they believed was inspired by goodness, rightness, humility, compassion, or justice?
Just ten years after that solitary man sat beating his drum for peace the Berlin Wall came down, the anti-Soviet Solidarity movement pushed for democracy in Poland, one million Chinese gathered in Tiananmen Square to press for reform, and the Rocky Flats plants was shut down by the Federal government.

DECEMBER 17, 2019
The Third Tuesday of Advent
First Reading  Genesis 49: 2, 8–10
Jacob called his sons and said to them: "Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob, listen to Israel, your father. "You, Judah, shall your brothers praise —your hand on the neck of your enemies; the sons of your father shall bow down to you. Judah, like a lion's whelp, you have grown up on prey, my son. He crouches like a lion recumbent, the king of beasts—who would dare rouse him? The scepter shall never depart from Judah, or the mace from between his legs, While tribute is brought to him, and he receives the people's homage."

Psalm 72: 1–2, 3–4 ab, 7–8, 17
May his name be blessed forever; as long as the sun his name shall remain. In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed; all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

Gospel  Matthew 1, 1–17
The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph
became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations.

Today is the first day in the traditional celebration of the O Antiphons. These chants come from Old Testament writings and are sung from December 17 to December 23, usually at night or vespers, and they comprise the Octave before Christmas. Each of the O Antiphons has a specific focus and call to prayer. Today is the Sapientia, or the O Wisdom antiphon. The prophet Isaiah calls us to remember that Jesus, the awaited messiah is ‘...Wonderful in his counsel and great is His wisdom.’ (Isaiah 28: 29) The prophetic words of Sirach (Sirach 24: 3 and Wisdom 8:2) also influence this beautiful and deep plea for a closer relationship to God. ‘You came forth from the mouth of the Most High and reaching from beginning to end You ordered all things mightily and sweetly. Come teach us the way of prudence.’ For generation after generation, whether ancient Hebrew or modern-day believers, families have sat around a fire, a kitchen table, or in the sanctuary of a church to hear the old stories, the tales of our ancestors who lived and died, and loved and lost, but mostly who prayed and sought God. This is the ancestry of our salvation.

Especially at this time of year, when the days grow shorter and the nights grow colder, we accept our physical and spiritual vulnerability. We draw in close to one another. We seek out connection against the terror of loneliness, despair, even death itself and we find our one true hope in the coming, the eternal coming of our Lord. We need this
reminder of our humanity, but especially of our essential quest to assure ourselves of the divine presence. And so, we sing, ‘O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.’ Ours is a voice of deep longing. Yet we rejoice. We celebrate. We delight in the Lord’s promise revealed to us. We exalt in the coming of the Lord.

Let the words of the ancient hymn be with you all the days of this season so that you may be assured of God’s everlasting love.

DECEMBER 18, 2019
The Third Wednesday of Advent
First Reading  Jeremiah 23: 5-8
Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice." Therefore, the days will come, says the LORD, when they shall no longer say, "As the LORD lives, who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt"; but rather, "As the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of the house of Israel up from the land of the north" – and from all the lands to which I banished them; they shall again live on their own land.

Psalm 72: 1-2, 12-13, 18-19
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous deeds. And blessed forever be his glorious name; may the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Gospel  Matthew 1: 18-25
This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph,
son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on Sinai: Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us. The ancient Hebrews often used the term O Adonai for ‘O God’ instead of the sacred word Yahweh. God’s true name was too hallowed to pronounce in human language and so this second of the O Antiphons names Him “O Adonai.” Matthew’s gospel names him Emmanuel, the prophet Jeremiah calls him, “a righteous shoot of David,” and the psalms sing of “his glorious name.” The O Antiphon for this date is a blending of Isaiah 11: 3b-5, “he shall not judge by what His eyes see,” Matthew 2: 6, Micah 5: 1, 2 Samuel 5: 2, and Jeremiah 32: 21. Those who celebrated the evening with Gregorian chants knew their scriptures well. The O Adonai antiphon reminds us that Jesus comes with ‘an outstretched arm’ to redeem us, to welcome us to the good news of the Kingdom. He lovingly invites us into his house, into his life so that we may feel welcomed with an outstretched arm. Imagine coming to someone’s house for dinner, or to a classroom, to any business, and you are greeted by the master of the house, the teacher, the CEO with open arms. “Welcome,’ they say. ‘We have been waiting for you.’ Wouldn’t you feel embraced, appreciated, accepted? Jesus stands before you, arms open wide to enfold you. You are welcomed in!

DECEMBER 19, 2019
The Third Thursday of Advent
First Reading Judges 13: 2-7, 24-25 a
There was a certain man from Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children.
An angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Though you are barren and have had no children, yet you will conceive and bear a son. Now, then, be careful to take no wine or strong drink and to eat nothing unclean. As for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb. It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines.” The woman went and told her husband, “A man of God came to me; he had the appearance of an angel of God, terrible indeed. I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, ‘You will be with child and will bear a son. So take neither wine nor strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For the boy shall be consecrated to God from the womb, until the day of his death.’” The woman bore a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up and the LORD blessed him; the Spirit of the LORD stirred him.

Psalm 71: 3-4 a, 5-6 ab, 16-17

Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress. O my God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked.

Gospel Luke 1: 5-25

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years. Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine
nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time." Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

The third in the O Antiphon series is O Radix Jesse, or ‘the root of Jesse.’ You stand for the ensign of mankind (Isaiah 11:10), before you kings shall keep silence and to you all nations shall have recourse (Isaiah 11:10). Come, save us, and do not delay (Habakkuk). Jesus is the anointed one, the ensign, the banner who goes before us into life. Just as the ancient Romans used the SPQR ensign to lead them into battle and the conquering of much of the known Western world, our savior, Jesus the Christ leads us.

Names are an important symbol of our identity. We are known by our name, and as it is affixed at our birth and lasts until our death, our name often connects us with a cultural as well as familial ancestry. In the first reading Manoah’s wife names their son, Samson, in Hebrew ‘sun.’ In Luke’s gospel Elizabeth steps forward out of tradition and names her son, John. Joseph names his son Jesus, whose friends and family know him as the carpenter’s son, Jesus of Nazareth. But he is also often referred to as “son of David,” “Emmanuel,” and “Messiah.”

In Hebrew Nazareth means root, and so the Davidic line of Jesus’ ancestry was well known to his family, partly perhaps because of the ancient prophets. Before he was king, David was a simple boy, the
eighth son of Jesse. The prophet Samuel passed over David’s seven older brothers and called him forth to slay Goliath, and become king of Israel.

During our proclamation of the mystery of faith one option we often sing is, ‘Save us savior of the world, for by your cross and resurrection you have set us free.’ The O Antiphon Radix Jesse urges, “Come and save us,” and “do not delay.” We are impatient for the coming of the Lord, but he is already here.

Our prayer is Trinitarian – we pray to the Father “Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.” This everlasting God even now lives and reigns with us through the Holy Spirit. Our urgency reflected in “do not delay” is a sign of our need and great desire to know him and to have our prayers answered. How long did Samson’s mother wait for a child? How many years did Elizabeth and Zachariah endure the disappointment and stigma of childlessness? For how many generations did the ancient Hebrews wait for the coming of the Messiah? Although we want our prayers and petitions answered within our own timeframe, we must remember that Advent is primarily a time of waiting. Surely the Lord’s coming is already accomplished – in our world and in our hearts. Moreover, he is the promise of all the answered prayers from the beginning of time. Yet Advent calls us to carve out a little time to reflect on and welcome his increased presence in the world and in our hearts.

DECEMBER 20, 2019
The Third Thursday of Advent
First Reading Isaiah 7: 10-14
The LORD spoke to Ahaz: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky! But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!" Then Isaiah said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary men, must you also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.
**Psalm 71: 3-4 a, 5-6 ab, 16-17**

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

**Gospel Luke 1: 26-28**

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

*O come, O Key of David, come, and open wide our heav'nly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel.*

And so we sing in Advent the rejoicing prayer: Christ is with us, rejoice! The ancient prophets foretold of the signs: the virgin birth, the house of David, the righteous shoot, the coming of the Lord. And Mary accepted the promise by saying *Yes.*

Today’s O Antiphon, *O Key of David,* again underscores Jesus’ lineage with the Kingship of David. One of the symbols of authority is a key; a key that opens a doorway to God’s kingdom.

*O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, You open and no one can close, You close and no one can open: Come and rescue the*
prisoners who are in darkness and the shadow of death. Just as in modern times when someone is granted a special honor and is given ‘the keys to the city,’ Jesus IS the key. He gently opens the way for us by his love and life. If we are imprisoned by sin and the frailties of life itself, he alone unlocks the prison door allowing us liberation from sinfulness and death. What a promise!

I used to have a keyring heavy with keys; one each for the house, the garage, the work shed, the office, the computer lab, the car, and so on. The weight of all those keys made a permanent bulge in my purse. But Jesus AS the key is no burden. Allow him to open the door to joy, faith, grace, forgiveness, and justice in your life.

DECEMBER 21, 2019
The Third Saturday of Advent
First Reading  Song of Songs 2: 8-14
Hark! my lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. My lover speaks; he says to me, "Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come!
"For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! "O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, Let me see you, let me hear our voice, For your voice is sweet, and you are lovely."

Psalm 33: 2-3, 11-12, 20-21
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp; with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises. Sing to him a new song; pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness.

Mary set out in those days and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah
and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The first reading from Solomon’s Song of Songs is reminiscent of what the first day of creation must have been like. It seems like a conversation between God, the Creator, and his beloved creation, man. ‘Here,’ God says ‘is all of creation in its fullness of beauty for you. Arise and see and rejoice.’ Then in Psalms we give thanks with shouts of joy. The O Antiphon for today is O Oriens.

_O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death._ The antiphon sings of light and sun and sunshine, images that the prophet Isaiah uses in Isaiah 9: 20 when he proclaims that “the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Jesus is the light of the world, the dawn of a new day, the ‘good news’ (gospel). He shatters the darkness and brings eternal light. What sort of darkness have you experienced? Loneliness, despair, a frightening diagnosis, abandonment, betrayal, grief, physical or emotional exhaustion? Each of us is vulnerable to any number of human frailties, but as we are reminded in Psalm 30:5 “…at dusk weeping comes for the night, but at dawn joy there is rejoicing.” Mary finds joy in the expectation of the angel Gabriel’s promise. Even Elizabeth’s unborn child expresses joy in the presence of the expected Messiah. Joy abounds in the coming of the Lord.

A counselor on television recently explained the difference between happiness and joy. "Many people want to be happy," she explained. “But happiness is fleeting, it is a momentary emotion. Joy is a deeper feeling and it persists through tough times.” We may sometimes feel unhappy with someone’s words, with a disappointment, or with our current situation. But we still can experience joy at the evidences of God’s love – just being alive, catching a companion’s smile, watching a sunrise, having a job, enjoying good health, or visiting with our friends. Joy carries us through. Nehemiah reminds us, “Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD is your strength!”
DECEMBER 22, 2019
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
First Reading  Isaiah 7: 10-14
The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky! But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!" Then Isaiah said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary people, must you also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.

Psalm 24: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6
The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

Second Reading  Romans 1: 1-7
Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel  Matthew 1: 18-24
This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Today’s gospel begins as many family stories begin in telling the story of someone’s birth. It sounds age-old. “This is the way we met,” or “This is how I proposed to your mother,” or “I’ll never forget the day you were born.” Each family has a ‘beginning’ narrative. The Old Testament Book of Genesis chronicles, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” The Gospel of John retells the story of our salvation in another way, “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Many of us know the account of the Holy Family as well as we know our own. But this story is more than a mere blessed event. Scripture tells us that ‘every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall proclaim’ the news of the savior’s birth.

Today’s O Antiphon, *O Rex Gentium*, announces the universal king, the Cosmic Christ. *O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.* In this chant we are reminded of the original creation and that we are the dust from which God made man. As God’s creation we have our joy in the coming of the Christ who saves us from sin and death. In “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” we sing, “*O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of humankind; O bid our sad divisions cease, and be for us our King of Peace.*” Aren’t we surrounded with ‘sad divisions’?

Divisions within the family, with neighbors, countrymen, nations? We live in a current climate of ‘us vs. them,’ and these fractions have the potential to destroy us. Jesus’ message of peace, love and compassion seem simple enough, but all too often these sentiments are swallowed up in selfishness, fear, and greed. Let us not forget Jesus’ birth as the King of Peace – not just peace for a few (the entitled, the chosen, the repentant) but peace for all in all times. O King of the nations, O prince of peace, O son of God, O Emmanuel, reverberate your example to us during this season and all the days of our lives!
DECEMBER 23, 2019
The Fourth Monday of Advent

First Reading Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; And suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek, And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, Refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the LORD. Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the LORD, as in the days of old, as in years gone by. Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, Before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day, To turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the land with doom.

Psalm 25: 4-5ab, 8-9, 10 and 14

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.


When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be? For surely the hand of the Lord was with him."
We come to the last of the O Antiphons, *O With Us is God-Emmanuel*. So far this Advent season we have celebrated the promise of the prophets: the coming of the Lord. His birth has been much anticipated. Mary and Joseph received separate announcements from the angel Gabriel, causing fear, some confusion, and ultimately assurance that God was working through them to achieve His purpose. Can you imagine their astonishment at the news? And many others also were involved in this great wonder: simple shepherds and their flocks, the Magi, Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, and King Herod the Great. But each of these persons told someone, who told someone else—and on and on the prophecy went. Imagine all those conversations! Some couldn’t believe it. Others wouldn’t believe it. Many welcomed the news, but most probably accepted it as gossip, just another story in a long line of chatter over the evening meal or a distraction to pass the time during seemingly endless labor. The ancient Hebrews believed from the time of Abraham God’s word to him: “I will maintain my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting covenant, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” (Genesis 17: 7) God has always been with us. He has never left us or abandoned us.

But with the birth of Jesus the Christ we now have something the ancients never had: Christ incarnate. (John 1:14) The ancient Hebrews sought God but never saw His face. God was not in the wind, the trembling earth, or the fire. He was present in the quiet voice, the stillness of the human heart that was desperate to know God in another way. And so, Jesus came to us to share his voice, his face, his words, and his life. He is with us in a different manner. For hundreds of years the hymn has been chanted at vespers in the waning days of the year; *O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of the people, come and set us free.*

Someone long ago no doubt sat contemplating the verses of “*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*” and noticed something intriguing. The first letter of each of the titles for the Messiah arranged in reverse order (Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, Sapientia), spells out the Latin phrase *ERO CRAS*, which means, “Tomorrow, I will come.” Tomorrow is the nativity of the Lord. Tomorrow we celebrate in an age-old tradition the birth of the Christ. Let us not forget the true meaning of the season. As difficult as it may be to comprehend, let us spend time imagining, understanding, and believing the
consequence of this event. God incarnate has come down to us, to be with us, and to be us.

DECEMBER 24, 2019
The Nativity of the Lord
The Mass at Night
First Reading  Isaiah 9: 1-6
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they
rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when
dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their
shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the
day of Midian. For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak
rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames. For a child is born to
us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name
him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David’s throne, and
over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and
justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do
this!

Psalm 96: 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13
Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands.
Sing to the LORD; bless his name.

Second Reading  2 Timothy 2: 11-4
Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to
reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly,
and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance
of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave
himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for
himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” and “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus,” and “suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host.” We hear these words each year and we know them well. Whether sung in churches or written on multi-colored Christmas cards we are familiar with the story. The Prince of Peace. Mary swaddling her first-born son. The shepherds and the angels. Peace on earth. But have we taken the meaning of this miraculous and holy story into our hearts and minds and lived the significance of it each day of our lives? We have been given this Advent, this season of waiting and anticipation, to carve out a special place and time to contemplate the enormity of the birth of a savior, the King of Kings, the Christ. Here we are at the climax of the Advent season. Emmanuel! Our Lord has come! But have we made room for him? The commercialized culture, and nature itself bespeaks of a rush to gather, whether it be presents
under the tree, or the preparations for the winter season and for the harvest. We are so busy. We rush, and cook, and decorate, and shop, and try to cover everything around us in tinsel and elaborate bows. But have we acknowledged our hope and our eternal prayer, “Come Lord Jesus, Come?”

Is there room under your tree for the Christ child? Is there a place at your table for the savior of the world? Is there a moment in your day to give thanks for the Incarnation? Have you made a home for Jesus in your life this season, and dedicated yourself to continue this relationship throughout the year? The gospel of Matthew reminds us to “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” The gift of Jesus comes at a price. Though we are loved by grace, we still owe a debt that can only be repaid by making room for Him in our lives. And the testament of our returned love is to love one another as He loved us, to forgive anyone who has harmed us, to show compassion to anyone who is less fortunate or is in need, and to be open-minded to those who may have different experiences, outlooks, and opinions than we hold. Fr. Richard Rohr suggests that Advent can be synonymous with other words: ‘aware, alive, attentive, alert, and awake.’ On this holy night, and from this day forward let us be aware of the Christ in our lives, alive to His presence and unending love, attentive to the many ways He works through us and with us, alert to the subtle signs of his presence in our daily encounters, and awake to the richness of His blessings offered to us each day in so many ways.

DECEMBER 25, 2019

Christmas Day
Mass at Dawn

The First Reading  Isaiah 62: 11-12

See, the LORD proclaims to the ends of the earth: say to daughter Zion, your savior comes! Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the LORD, and you shall be called "Frequented," a city that is not forsaken.
Psalm 97: 1, 6, 11-12
The LORD is king; let the earth rejoice; let the many isles be glad. The heavens proclaim his justice, and all peoples see his glory.

Second Reading  Titus 3: 4-7
Beloved: When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Gospel  Luke 2: 15-20
When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

If you have ever fallen in love you may recall with pleasure the feelings surrounding those mystical and wonderful moments. The world seemed like a wonderful place. You couldn’t stop smiling. You might have lost track of time, and all you wanted was to be in the presence of your beloved. Countless romantic songs depict how ‘your feet didn’t touch the ground,’ or how ‘your two hearts seemed to beat as one,’ and so on. Love is a splendored thing. But this sort of infatuation, even though it may lead to true devotion and commitment, doesn’t last forever. At some point you have to get down to the ‘living your love’ and that can be difficult in human relationships.

Consider the kind of love you feel (if you have had children) at the birth of your child. What could be more enduring? What could be more all-encompassing? But as the child grows and becomes more
independent the love endures, but at times it is clouded by frustration, confusion, and even exasperation. The same can be true with adult, mature love relationships. At some point we have to fall in love all over again. Sometimes it takes conscious work. At other times it may take only a special look across the breakfast table. In any case, we must consciously remind ourselves that love must be maintained, regenerated, and at times reborn.

The Christ child came into the world as a vulnerable, helpless infant who depended completely on the love and care of his parents, Joseph and Mary. No doubt as he grew, their love for him deepened and developed. In time, they grew to understand who he was and what his mission was in the world. His parents never lost sight of the original amazement, adoration, and love they had for him there in that stable surrounded by shepherds, in the worship of the Magi, and in the memory of the original proclamation from the angel, Gabriel.

Mary said ‘Yes’ to God’s call, and Joseph did likewise. We, too must say ‘Yes’ to falling in love with Jesus each day. Abraham and Moses, the apostles, and many others said ‘Yes’ to God even when it required them to do things they knew they could not do alone. Throughout the history of salvation countless people – ordinary people – have said ‘Yes’ to God. Our call is to fall in love with Jesus all over again. By falling in love with Jesus we invite forgiveness and compassion into our lives. We acknowledge our brokenness and our fear, yet we arm ourselves with that wondrous sense of being in love: all things are possible, the world is a beautiful place, and mostly, I am a beloved child of God.

Say ‘YES’ to love and by doing so, say ‘YES’ to the Christ.

1 Corinthians 13 so beautifully consoles us in this dark and troubled world; ‘Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

And when you sing the songs of Christmas, remember that these are love songs.
Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses. Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save.

Brothers and sisters: You have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he
was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.” Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

I used to teach a course titled, The Creative Experience, which examined the creative process and how students could enhance their own creativity in all aspects of their lives. One of the assignments was to go about a well-traveled path – their walk to and from class, their drive home, the street they always drove to the grocery or favorite eating spot – and to take time to look, really look at their surroundings. We often put ourselves on ‘auto pilot’ when performing familiar tasks – doing the dishes, brushing our teeth, driving to work – and so we miss the ordinary gifts along the way. Each task, each pathway, each moment can offer an insight, a delight, a twinkling of grace. In the case of my students, they saw a new world. Sometimes it was something as simple as blooming flowers, or a downed tree. Other times it was something more complex; sadness in someone’s face, a field plowed under for new construction, or the recognition that you hadn’t contacted an old friend in a long time. By doing the exercise the students had an awareness. Slow down. Take time. Appreciate the journey. Look and listen.

The Magi saw something wondrous and new on their journey. They traveled far and, seeing the star which led them to the house with Mary and the child, they paused to look, to listen, to be amazed. Then
they did the most miraculous thing...they returned home ‘by another way.’ They were changed by what they experienced. They knew they would never be the same, and neither would we.

When we allow ourselves to behold the Christ child, we cannot help but be changed. We are on a new path. We go about our lives with a new outlook. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, we may have lived with dark clouds over us, but now we walk by light. We raise our eyes and see the radiant light of Jesus, the child of Mary, the Son of God, the Christ.

Now that the hustle and bustle of the season is coming to an end, how will you walk a different path? How will you allow the Christ to shine in your life and change your old habits, your well-worn pathway? How will you look and truly see your life in Christ? Will you be more patient with your family? More attuned to the needs of others around you? More open-minded to the views of those who disagree with you? More grateful for the great blessings of this life?

Through it all let us be like the Magi who followed that star, stood in his presence and paid him homage. But mostly let us continue on in our daily living by another way, a way led by Christ and his love.

You are encouraged to reflect on the complete readings that are listed for each date. A thoughtful study of the Word can bring you much closer to the true meaning of our Advent season. These reflections were inspired by many sources, most of which I have noted. I offer them as a complement to your own traditions of prayer, worship, and contemplation during this Holy Season.

A copy of this booklet is available online at Amazon.com

Edited and written by
Claudia Sullivan
2019

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