

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
Third Sunday of Advent
2020—B Cycle



Image courtesy of [Sharon McCutcheon](#)
via [unsplash.com](#)

For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

God of all that is and ever will be . . .
be with me as I reflect on the meaning of your word.
Open my mind and heart . . . to receive the word of Scripture.
Let the dawn of your Wisdom . . . enlighten and guide my reflection.
Open my heart . . . to make room for the Christ Child.
Let his loving presence . . . guide and shape my words and actions.
I ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Amen

Source untraceable

Introduction to the Third Sunday of Advent

In *Bible Diary 2007*, [Megan McKenna](#) reflects on this weekend's gospel (John 1: 6 ff):

"Our God comes to save us, to open our eyes to the truth and our ears to the Word spoken among us, and to set us dancing and singing. There is no place for mourning and sorrow—we are the glory and splendor of our God more surely than any tree or land. We must learn to wait, like the land waits for harvest.

“Our God comes . . . in peace, in freedom, in the poor, and those who speak the word of God in justice and forgiveness and mercy. He comes to those who suffer, who are patient and forgiving, and he comes like the prophets—with the word that burns and startles. John heard of Jesus and wondered. His friends asked Jesus, ‘Are you the one to come?’ — Look around. We know if our God is with us by these *signs*: healing, openness, conversion, freedom, the outcasts are welcomed home, people dead in despair and misery are given life, and the good news is preached to the poor of the world.”

Readings

Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11 “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.”

Responsorial . . . Luke 1: 46-50, 53-54 “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.”

First Thessalonians 5: 16-24 “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.”

John 1: 6-8, 19-28 John the Baptist responded, “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (61: 1-2, 10-11)

The author, referred to as “third” Isaiah, recalls the message and mission he received from God, to announce to the Jewish exiles who returned to a Jerusalem in ruins that Yahweh will bless their efforts. They will rebuild on the ruins of their homes and repair the temple. Those doubtful or discouraged must persevere, because soon, God will come to visit his people.

The spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,
because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up broken hearts,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
freedom to those languishing in prison;
to announce the year of Yahweh’s favor
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to give comfort to all who grieve.

I rejoice greatly in Yahweh,
my soul exults for joy in my God,
for he has clothed me in the garments of his salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of his righteousness,
like a bridegroom wearing a garland,
like a bride adorned with jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its growth,
and as a garden makes seeds spring up,
so will the Lord Yahweh make justice and praise
spring up in the sight of all nations.

Personal Reflection

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon” *each one of us*. The Lord has anointed *us* in both Baptism and Confirmation and commissioned *us* to bring glad tidings . . . heal the brokenhearted . . . proclaim liberty . . . release prisoners . . . comfort those who mourn.”

The prophet challenges me to play a “prophetic role” in the world. To live as a prophet in 2020 might mean speaking truth to power . . . compassionate living when faced with someone’s need . . . (add to this list from your own experience).

— *In what sense do I see myself sharing a “prophetic role” in the Catholic Church today? In the broader society?*

— *Whom did I encounter in my daily life this week who was “lowly,” “brokenhearted,” “captive/prisoner,” or “mourning”? What did I do to help them? Looking back on that encounter, what do I wish I had done?*

This week’s responsorial “Psalm” is from St. Luke’s Gospel (1: 46-50. 53-54)

(Compare with Isaiah 61: 10 ff)

In the Gospels (and “Acts of the Apostles”), Mary seems unobtrusive, playing no active role in Jesus’ ministry. Here, she shares her amazing story with Elizabeth, her “cousin.” In Mary’s world, a *different culture* defined “family.” Relationship might mean more than “blood.” Mary proclaims the historical revolution already begun with the conception of her son—(1) the mercy of God who always keeps his promises; (2) the change about to take place in the human condition. Mary remained with Elizabeth “about” three months and then returned home. Did Mary stay until John was born? Most scholars deem it unlikely. Difficult travel by donkey back to Nazareth might have put her at risk of miscarriage.

My soul rejoices in my God.

And Mary said (to Elizabeth),
“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit exults in God, my savior!
He has looked upon his servant, in her lowliness,
and people, forever, will call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me.
Holy is his Name!”

My soul rejoices in my God.

“From age to age, his mercy extends
to those who live in his presence.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
but has sent the rich away empty.

He held out his hand to Israel, his servant,
for he remembered his mercy.”

My soul rejoices in my God.

Personal Reflection

Our late pastor Fr. Brian T. Joyce taught us that the “Magnificat”—which he calls “the gospel before the gospel”—contained a “revolutionary” meaning.

— *Where do I find counter-cultural traces of “revolution,” in Mary’s proclamation?*

— *What is my image of Mary as a woman? As a mother? As a widow?*

— *Where did I get my image of Mary?*

From the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (5: 16-24)

“Do not quench the Spirit” (v. 19). Paul’s new community of mostly Greek converts had few religious traditions and written instructions on how to persevere in their newfound faith. After Paul’s forced absence, they depended on the intervention of the Spirit. Among these Christians, some gifted with the charism of prophecy would often receive their communications during the Eucharistic assemblies. That is why Paul asks the community to benefit from these spiritual messages—but *not without* first examining them to see if they are in harmony with his teaching.

“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing and give thanks to God at every moment. This is the will of God, your vocation as Christians. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the prophets’ warnings. *Put everything to the test* and hold fast to what is good. Avoid evil, wherever it may be.

“May the God of peace make you holy and bring you to perfection. May you be completely blameless in spirit, soul, and body, till the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord. He who called you is faithful . . . and will do it.”

Personal Reflection

We have subtle ways of stifling the spirit of those closest to us.

— *What do I need to be more aware of in the way I relate to and encourage the people I encounter and influence every day, starting with my own my own family?*

— *How do I sometimes stifle the wisdom of the Holy Spirit within myself? In others?*

— *What will I commit to do today to encourage, rather than discourage, one member of my family?*

— How good am I at encouraging *myself*? In what ways do I reinforce my negative self-image? What one thing will I commit to today to turn my negative self-image in a more positive direction?

Proclamation from the Gospel according to John (1: 6-8, 19-28)

“Messiah” (*the one anointed with oil*) is the name the Jews gave to their expected Savior. They also expected a superior Prophet but had not yet settled on an answer this key question: Would the Prophet be someone other than the Messiah? Or the same person. Jews of the first century AD/CE also believed that the Prophet Elijah (taken up in a fiery chariot) would reappear before the Messiah’s arrival (see [Mark 9: 11-13](#)).

“A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came to bear witness, and as a witness to introduce the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but a *witness* to introduce the Light.

“This was the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, ‘Who are you?’

“John recognized the truth and did not deny it. He said, ‘I am *not* the Messiah.’

“And they asked him, ‘Then who are you? Elijah?’

“He answered, ‘I am not.’

“They said, ‘Are you the Prophet?’

“And he answered, ‘No.’

“Then they said to him, ‘Tell us who you are, so we can give some answer to those who sent us. How do you see yourself?’

“And John said, quoting the prophet [Isaiah](#), ‘*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord!*’

“Those who had been sent were Pharisees. They put a further question to John, ‘Then why are you baptizing, if you are not the Messiah . . . or Elijah . . . or the Prophet?’

“John answered, ‘I baptize you with water, but among you stands one whom you do not know; although he comes after me, I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.’

“This happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”



Source: [Yardenit](#): Jordan River Baptismal site

Personal Reflection

The big questions John had to answer were, “Who are you?” and “Why do you baptize?” With so many Catholics, young and old, drifting away in recent years from active participation, the question for today’s Catholics is: “Why do I remain as an active Catholic?”

- *How do I answer this “why remain” question for myself?*
- *How would I answer someone who put that question to me directly. [I can’t ignore it, because Jesus asks me today, as he asked his apostles ([John 6: 69-69](#)), “Will you too go away?)]*
- *What is the bedrock of my faith? My personal experience of God? Scripture? The Eucharist? Mary? Pope Francis? Bishops and priests? Something or someone else?*
- *If I have done my best to guide my children to Jesus and the Church, and they have chosen to go another way—as many do—how am I dealing with that? What would Jesus want you to do?*

The Week Ahead

During this coming week, we will celebrate two major Feasts of Mary the mother of Jesus. On December 8th we celebrate the feast of Mary’s [Immaculate Conception](#). On the 12th, the [Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#).

Personal Reflection

- *What is the current status of my own personal devotion to Jesus’ mother?*
- *How does my regard for Mary differ from my mother’s or my grandmother’s devotion to Mary?*
- *What role am I willing to let Mary play in my life as a Catholic—now? If Mary has no real importance in my spiritual life, how do I explain that?*

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend’s liturgical readings? Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues.

Suggested prompt:

- *After reflecting on this weekend’s scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn’t simply be grateful “recipients” of God’s good gifts. We also need to “give back.”

- *How will this week’s Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and “give back” during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Reading

Video:

[“It is Well with My Soul”](#)

[Hugh Bonneville](#) (“Downton Abbey”), supported by musicians and actors, narrates a wonderful, inspiring story, based on the real lives of the Spafford family (17 min.).
(*Don’t miss it!— AJG*)

Book:

[The Baltimore Catechism Revisited](#) by [Brian T. Joyce](#)

An anthology of his homilies and writings.

Music:

[“Mary, Did You Know?”](#) sung by [Clay Aiken](#), with lyrics by Mark Lowry in 1984, and music written by Buddy Greene in 1991.

[Andrea Bocelli](#) sings an angelic [“The Lord’s Prayer”](#) for Pope Francis in Philadelphia, PA (September 26, 2015).

Preview of Next Session

4th Sunday of Advent

Second Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

Responsorial Psalm 89: 2-5, 27, 29

Romans 16: 25-27

Luke 1: 26-38

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

by Howard Thurman

(based on today’s Isaiah reading)

(slowly)

When the song of the angels is stilled . . .
when the star in the sky is gone . . .
when kings and priests are home;
when the shepherds are back
with their flocks . . .
the *real work* of Christmas begins.

To *find* the lost,
to *heal* the broken,
to *feed* the hungry,
to *release* the prisoner,

*rebuild the nation,
bring peace among peoples,
and to make music in the heart!
Amen.*

*For an array of Christmas prayers (including this week's closing prayer),
see [GodWeb](#).*

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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(follow this link to my religious novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))