

Praying toward Christmas:



Meditations for Advent

St James
Episcopal Church
St James
2017

From the Rector

Advent is a season when we take time to wait and pray for the coming of our Lord. This Advent we have a wonderful gift: parishioners have been willing to open their hearts, minds, and spirits to us all by offering meditations on the readings for each day. Our meditations continue into the Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. I pray that you will find this a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal.

Blessings,

Raemyne

How to use this book of meditations

- ◆ Begin by praying. You might like to use the sixteenth century prayer, "God be in my head," below
- ◆ Read the readings for the day. They come from the lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer. We have listed a taster verse for the reading that is the primary focus of each meditation; however, you will get the most out of the meditations if you look up the full readings in your bible. You can also find links to the readings on the calendar at www.lectionarypage.net.
- ◆ Think about what stands out for you in the readings. You may like to write about what you discover in a journal. Then look at the day's meditation, and see if it offers unexpected insights.
- ◆ Finish your time with prayer, thanking God for what you have heard, and asking for God's presence in the day ahead, and concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

God be in my head
And in my understanding:
God be in mine eyes
And in my looking:
God be in my mouth
And in my speaking:
God be in my heart
And in my thinking:
God be at mine end,
And at my departing.

Thursday before Advent I

November 30

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Zechariah 13:1-9

Revelation 14:6-13

Peter Cahill

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80: 3)

When I read this selection I began wondering about the writer's sense of relationship with the Almighty. My sense was who are we to tell God what to do... Shine forth and we shall be restored. Restored to what? To our position of self centered greatness, to our position of power over our fellow believers, to our position of wealth and privilege? What if we/they have fallen from those positions for a reason? Had they (we) been proud, or haughty, selfish, ungrateful, greedy? Again the writer tells the Almighty "Let thy face shine and we shall be saved." Is God a lamp that can be turned aside or toward his beloved creation? What if it is we who through our actions who have turned away? If we are the ones who have put on the sun block of sin? We who have donned the cold rubber raincoat that separates us from the warmth of the love of the Almighty? Was the writer foretelling us of the ultimate Gift when he writes "Let thy right hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the Son of Man." Son of man, isn't that what the Christ said of himself? Then going on writes never turn back." I see the image of children who begrudgingly we were wrong, but we'll never do **that** again... restore us to your goodness. As though we're saying forgive us... we accept your chastisement. Then, as though to make sure of forgiveness, the psalmist argues... You wouldn't want those whom you have not chosen to laugh at us for trusting in You. Is the writer saying You've made your point, now STOP?

It seems backwards to me and maybe it should. We after all are the ones created. We are the ones who need to listen, to appreciate all that we have been given. We are the ones who, with God's help, need to remove the things and rethink our choices, all of which stand between us and the love of our creator, so we feel the warmth of God's love shining on us. We need to realize that when we stop feeling the warmth, we need to look at ourselves, swallow our pride and ask for help taking off the layers of separation.

This Advent, let's resolve to get our relationship right with God. Ask for the help we need to find the snaps and zippers to that rubber rain suit of choices that feed our desires, not our relationship with God. As we prepare for the Christmas in our material world, instead of stressing and rushing, buying wasting and cooking, let's make sure we take time to listen first. Let's accept when the Almighty says we've done enough to make ourselves ready to fully receive the greatest gift of all. Not as we deserve, but as God wants for us.

Friday before Advent I

December I

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Zechariah 14:1-9

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

See, a day is coming for the Lord...(Zechariah 14:1)

Advent 1971

When will he come
and how will he come
and will there be warnings
and will there be thunders
and rumbles of armies
coming before him
and banners and trumpets
When will he come
and how will he come
and will we be ready

O woe to you people
you sleep through the thunder
you heed not the warnings
the fires and the drownings
the earthquakes and stormings
and ignorant armies
and dark closing on you
the song birds are falling
the sea birds are dying
no fish now are leaping
the children are choking
in air not for breathing
the aged are gasping
with no one to tend them

a bright star has blazed forth
and no one has seen it
and no one has wakened

Madeleine L'Engle

Saturday before Advent I

December 2

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Micah 2:1-13

Matthew 24:15-31

Stephanie Coleman

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:15-31)

This year I randomly tore a strip off the reflections paper and blithely went on my way. It wasn't until I opened my Bible and read my assignments that I realized this wasn't going to be easy.

I have read the above over and over and I must say that I struggled to find the "Christmas Joy" in these passages. Prayer for Israel's Restoration! Social Evils Denounced! The Desolating Sacrilege! None of this conjures up images of the heavenly host gloriously announcing the birth of the baby Jesus. No shining stars, warm mangers or kingly gifts. Nope, just the Lord's displeasure at our wickedness. Disappointment in our haughtiness. They tell of a time of persecution and suffering. All was not well with the world. And I can't help but think that the world right now seems to be filled with a similar darkness.

But then, at the end, we are given hope. "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved." "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven....And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." And we are reminded that the birth of the infant Jesus was not all warmth and light. His people were persecuted, and his family would have to flee. There would be many more years to go, and pain and suffering before he would ascend into Heaven to be with his father.

It is good to be reminded that Jesus' birth was a gift to all of us to save us from our own shortcomings. While it is easy (and joyful) to reflect on the happy story of Jesus' birth, it is also important to reflect how easily mankind falls into a state of sinfulness and how often we break our covenant with God. I am reminded that through all the awful things that are happening in the world today, if we keep our covenant with God, he will share with us the unfathomable gift that is his son. And somehow, Christmas Joy seeps into my heart again and I am warmed by the love of our Father.

First Sunday in Advent

December 3

Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

Jeremy Linzee

*Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8)*

There is such an immense tug back and forth within these three lines from Isaiah. Taken at face value one might look to the pairing of God as “Father”, “Potter” and His people as “Clay” and “Work” of His “Hand” as a description of our utter reliance on his protection and shaping. We cannot exist without his work in our lives and we are powerless to shape who and what we are and are about. Within this reading we are lead to believe that who we are has already been given to us and with God’s help we just need to “find” it. There is a beautiful aspect to this as we learn to get out of our selves and find deeper meaning in God’s love and protection.

The Christmas story, however, helps us understand an additional meaning to these three lines. For rather than just remain a self-contained power that spins us into motion, God also got out of himself, was born in Bethlehem, and became a baby. As makers and artists are apt to admit, the material they shape, the clay they mold, often poses questions and challenges that shape them as they work. This is a wonderful mystery, and in many ways most if not all great art has come not only from mastery of a technique (i.e. utter control of a medium) but a willingness to give up preconceived notions, an ability to explore, adapt, and most of all get out of oneself.

I like to think of God this way, and that the birth of Christ is one of many examples of God getting out of himself, working into new territory that had yet to be explored.

Monday in the First Week of Advent

December 4

Psalm 79

Micah 4:1-5

Revelation 15:1-8

*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more (Micah 4:3)*

An Appendix to the Vision of Peace

Tosefet Lachazon Hashalom

Don't stop after beating the swords
into plowshares, don't stop! Go on beating
and make musical instruments out of them.
Whoever wants to make war again
will have to turn them into plowshares first.

Yehuda Amichai

Tuesday in the First Week of Advent

December 5

Psalm 79

Micah 4:6-13

Revelation 18:1-10

Edna Rousseau

God established his covenant with Israel and the 10 commandments warning us to beware of materialistic tendencies, associated with greed and self-indulgence. In Babylon, where there was a rebellion against God, with worshipping of other Gods, the fires of Babylon occurred. "Because she has glorified herself she will receive torment."

Micah chapter 4 speaks to the redemption of those in Babylon with the final triumph of Israel. This resulted in healing and purification with the lesson that if there is difficult work to be done, God will give us the strength and ability to do it as long we have faith.

Revelation 18 is again a warning against selfishly held wealth. "Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself." Truly, a righteous and upright character is the treasure to be achieved in this life.

Wednesday in the First Week of Advent

December 6

Psalm 79

Micah 5:1-5a

Luke 21:34-38

Kathy Mauro

We know Advent to be a time of preparation. Throughout these 4 weeks we continually hear about the covenant with God's people for God to send a righteous lord to deliver them and that we need to prepare for that coming. The Gospel according to Luke provides very specific instructions as how to be prepared. To "Be on guard", and not to be "weighed down...with the worries of this life".

What is different and of great comfort in this week's readings is the message of forgiveness in Psalm 79. In the psalm there is a plea for mercy, which we now know is given by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus that completes the circle and provides the grace in our lives that will allow us to properly prepare for his coming, then, in the future, and even now as we allow Him to act through our lives.

Thursday in the First Week of Advent

December 7

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Hosea 6:1-6

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Lilian Ercole

Come, let us return to the Lord... (Hosea 6:1)

The passage from Hosea reminds me of Jesus and the crucifixion. As we suffer, we push God away, but when we return to God, "give it to God" or accept *his* will, we get mercy and not judgement. We are healed from our pain - physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Like Jesus suffered for us and rose again in three days to be with God, we can too, here and now on earth, when we are forgiving as God forgives *us*. These "actions" of mercy and forgiveness and acknowledgment of God are more important than words, that is, the sacrificial and burnt offerings of the Old Testament.

Acta non verba.

Merciful and forgiving actions, not only words.

Friday in the First Week of Advent

December 8

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Acts 11:19-26

*Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. (Psalm 85: 8)*

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry

Saturday in the First Week of Advent

December 9

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Mark 11:27-33

Brian Bates

*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (Psalm 85:10)*

I sometimes wonder how it is possible to find peace in a world that seems to grow more and more chaotic with each breaking news alert that vibrates my phone. Verse 10 of the 85th Psalm suggests to me that if I can only remain firm and constant in my love, of God and my neighbor, and remain full of faith, I can move towards righteousness and, at least, greet peace. I am aware that the method of my analysis would not necessarily bring tranquility to a classically trained logician, but it does lead me to a place of restfulness.

Second Sunday in Advent

December 10

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark 1:1-8

Wylie Hunt

Vivid images of blazing a trail, venturing through the wilderness, and preparing a path in the desert are interspersed in these readings. We are urged to be faithful in our waiting, as God descends to us in love.

Advent is a time of preparation, of waiting patiently for the coming of the glory of the Lord. We are reminded in these readings to prepare the wilderness of our hearts to receive God's promise, our salvation. Isaiah speaks of making "straight in the desert a highway for our God." The Psalm tells us that "Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps." Mark says: "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

How do we prepare? How can we be found to be at peace? How can we be filled with the steadfast love and faithfulness that we yearn for as we attempt to wait patiently and faithfully? How do we choose to be attentive to God's Word and the intention of Christmas and not be confused by the chatter of the culture and the bustle and demands of commerce?

In the last year and a half, I have worked hard to set aside some quiet time each morning upon awakening to read, to meditate and to pray. This is a discipline that has not come easily to me, but requires diligence and perseverance. Some mornings the quiet time is a struggle, and sometimes it follows a natural, easy flow. By simply trying to be still and by resting in the loving embrace of the Gentle Shepherd, I am sustained throughout my day.

During these Advent days, days of darkness and cold, perhaps you might set aside some time to sit quietly with yourself, to read a favorite portion of Scripture, the Daily Office or the Lectionary. As we rest in the beauty of God's Word, may we be calmed and quieted in his loving presence, his life-giving grace. In quietness and rest, we blaze the wilderness of our hearts to receive in abundance God's descent in love.

Psalm 27

Isaiah 26:7-15

Acts 2:37-42

Madelyn Cousins

How Psalms Can Help Us Pray

- 1 *The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*
- 2 *When the wicked advance against me to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.*
- 3 *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*
- 4 *One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*
- 5 *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.*
- 6 *Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.*
- 7 *Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.*
- 8 *My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.*
- 9 *Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.*
- 10 *Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.*
- 11 *Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.*
- 12 *Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.*
- 13 *I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*
- 14 *Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.*

The Psalms show us the Old Testament community of faith relating openly and honestly to the God of Israel. They therefore include important principles of effective prayer for believers today.

The book of Psalms served as both hymnal and prayer book for ancient Israel. It was the record of how the chosen nation once worshiped and prayed to their God. Prayer is one of the most important – and sometimes most difficult – things we learn to do. It is important, because it is an

opportunity to talk to God. It is sometimes difficult, though, because it can seem to be an awkward and one-sided conversation. Psalm 27 is one of my favorite Psalms because I always feel like I am praying when I read it quietly to myself or say it out loud.

Here are some important principles from the Psalms to help you pray more effectively:

- 1) Don't be afraid to say what's on your mind. You should always approach God respectfully, and it is always appropriate to praise him. There are times when you are filled with hope and enthusiasm.
- 2) Don't hide your mistakes. Some people feel awkward about praying, especially after they have made a big mistake. Or perhaps they have not prayed for a long time, and they think they aren't worthy of God's love and acceptance.
- 3) Wait for God's answer. Prayer is a spiritual act of worship in which we share our most intimate thoughts with God the Father (Luke 11:2), through Jesus Christ his Son.
- 4) Have confidence in the outcome. When everything around us seems to be falling apart, it's hard to walk by faith. As we build our relationship and



friendship with the same God who listened to the prayers of David and other authors of the Psalms, we will also grow in courage and faith. We will feel confident in asking for courage, help and faith.

Adapted from a 1994 article by
John Halford

Tuesday in the Second Week of Advent

December 12

Psalm 27

Isaiah 4:2-6

Acts 11:1-18

Lil Moleti

ACTS 11: 1-18 When Peter (who was a practicing Jew) ' ate nothing common or unclean' heard through the Holy Spirit that God would show no partiality but even bring the gospel to the Gentiles. He and others with whom he was sent - went to the home of a favored gentile and with Peter's words this stranger too, would be filled with the Holy Spirit, as our Lord had promised re: baptism by such, and they glorified God.

In the Christmas season the profound and angelically beautiful, powerful carols ring out and I feel the power of the Holy Spirit upon all. ALL, hear this incredible music, if we let its sound pervade the secular songs of the day- Christian & non- believer. When we feel the Holy Spirit among us, we

rejoice together, there is no partiality. We like Peter are called to bring the spirit to others bringing" joy to the world, for the Lord has come".

Wednesday in the Second Week of Advent December 13

Psalm 27

Malachi 2:10 – 3:1

Luke 1:5-17

Chris Mauro

The importance of Advent I think is mostly misunderstood. For me, it is far more than a season of preparation for Christmas. It is not unlike Lent in that it is meant to be a time of reflection and an opportunity to repent, that is to turn back to God.

But again, it is more than that. In order to repent it is implied the you know the right way and just need to get back on track. Advent is more of time to "re-boot", and less about making corrections.

With Raewynne leaving I'm reminded of the process by which she was called to minister here with us at St. James. Prior to her being called we spent some time with an interim priest. As it was explained to me, the role of an interim priest is primarily to reduce the level of dissatisfaction, and not to raise the level of satisfaction. That is to say, to get that parish comfortable, prepared and looking forward. This is not that different that the role John the Baptist plays in the Gospel according to Luke.

So, Advent is really a time to strip away all the baggage of the past year. To strip away the idea or need of who we want God to be in our lives. For me, Advent is a time to go back to square one, freeing ourselves of all that has happened in the past, both bad and good. Then with a clean heart and clear mind to allow God's grace to transform us in the works He calls us to do.

Thursday in the Second Week of Advent December 14

Psalm 126

Habakkuk 2:1-5

Philippians 3:7-11

Donna Austin

He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,

Although this Psalm may look back on an actual loss and great restoration of fortunes for Zion, it continues to speak to me today. What captured my attention was the fact that even though there was something unfortunate going on, the great reward went to those who, while weeping, continued to go forth and sow seeds: they did not give up. There is certainly a message in this for me.

I imagine the seeds being sown as the spreading of the Word and as any of the good deeds which we are each called to do in order to visibly demonstrate the faith we have. In trying to do the will of God here on Earth, we are called to use our time, talents and treasure in ministry and mission to bring about God's kingdom. And, we are called to do this in both good times and bad. Even while weeping and enduring difficult situations and times, we should continue to carry and sow the seeds of the Good News.

Friday in the Second Week of Advent

December 15

Psalms 126

Habakkuk 3:2-6

Philippians 3:12-16

Laura Beirne

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. (Philippians 3:12-16)

Sticker charts have become quite the thing in our household lately. True confession: Over the past three years, we've learned that parenting young children (perhaps parenting children at any age) is much more about learning what works and being willing to adapt rather than fixed notions of how this all should be going. At some point between temper tantrums and the terrible two's, I discovered the power of this simple tool of positive reinforcement with Madi. I've learned that Madi will do just about anything to earn a sticker on her sticker chart. She is very motivated by the positive reinforcement of a little colorful star sticker on a handwritten sticker chart that I made haphazardly in between my morning cups of coffee. It really works. It has faithfully brought us through potty training, bedtimes, quiet times, naps, and more. The power of the sticker chart is that Madi can envision the goal, she sees it in front of her. She has a role to play in achieving her goal. She knows there's a way to reach it and she's faithful in her persistence in getting there. And her successes only fuel her fire!

It's a silly comparison, but I couldn't help but raise this illustration in mind when contemplating the Christian focus Paul is sharing here: keeping our eye on the prize and straining towards it. Just as Madi finds real motivation from her goal of a simple sticker on a paper chart, there's something about the Christian walk that is motivating each of us. Day in and day out, despite our past mistakes and our concerns about the future, we strain ahead in our journey, finding deep joy and purpose in seeking Christ and getting to

know Him more deeply. We know that the Lord is working in and through us, even without our own faulty works, and yet our efforts do matter in this journey. We must continually strive, seek, and grow in our faith. And, thankfully, there is joy in the journey—we will have periods of growth and periods of failure. The Apostle Paul humbly confesses twice in this short passage that he has not yet obtained his goal yet, so we can expect challenges of our own. And yet we know the Lord will bless our efforts—perhaps not with a sticker, but with something far greater.

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Matthew 21:42)

Saturday in the Second Week of Advent

December 16

Psalm 126

Habakkuk 3:13-19

Matthew 21:28-32

MaryJane DeVito

Which of the two did the will of his father? (Matt. 21:31)

This is the parable about the man who had two sons and asked them both to go to work in the vineyard. The first son said that he would not go, but later repented and went. The second son said that he would go and then didn't. Jesus asks his disciples, “Which son did his father's will?”

It seems as though just about every other day we come to that moment of decision – whether or not to follow through on a promise, or a plan, or a connection that we said we would keep. We're tired because we worked hard that day. We feel a little sick; maybe a cold coming on. We have something to do at home. It's cold outside. It's raining. Or maybe we're just not interested, and the couch and TV are calling us.

I am not about to judge others by their failure to fulfill a commitment. I have certainly failed to do so more than a few times. One thing I know is true for me, though. I always feel guilty because I let someone down because that's inconsiderate. I think about the person who was counting on me, and I know that I have inconvenienced or disappointed them without a good reason. I have also learned from experience that every time I connect with others, either to help them, or to join an activity I am glad that I did. Human interaction is an energy that inspires and energizes more often than it results in regret. Sharing time with friends, old or new, invites us to live in that moment, which is one time only, never to repeat itself exactly the same way again. It's Jesus' peace and love, a manifestation of what we have been called upon by Him to do.

I tell my students, "Get up and get dressed, get into your car, and drive to the campus. The rest is easy. There are people here who need you to show up, and you need them." I have been inspired and energized over the years by thousands of students who showed up.

The son who said he didn't want to come to the vineyard, but later repented and went did his father's will. He loved his father and felt badly about disappointing him and not helping him. We parents are so easily hurt by our children. We rationalize that they are busy with their own lives, and that we know they love us. It means so much though when they show up.

Third Sunday in Advent

December 17

Exodus 17:1-7

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalms 126 or Luke 1:46b-55

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Diane Ried

I chose this date because it is our middle daughter's birthday. Today, she would have been 44 years old. She died last Spring leaving behind her husband and two boys. It makes me think of our vulnerability and mortality. Our readings for today talk about challenges. These pieces all inspire me.

John 1:23: "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'."

Isaiah 61: 1: "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."

Psalms 126:5: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything. Hold on to the good."

In Advent, we contemplate the new beginnings coming with the birth of Jesus. Some of us have a hard time at the holidays because of lost love ones and family conflicts. Still, God and our community remind us of a future of joy. We may be in the desert or darkness now, but God will lead us to the right path of future happiness. My lovely grandsons have been a healing for us and for their father. Whatever your challenges are, "Hold on to the good."

Monday in the Third Week of Advent

December 18

Psalms 125

1 Kings 18:1-18

Ephesians 6:10-17

Emily Mauro

In Ephesians we are told to put on the armor of God to so that we can stand against evil. It is a call to be prepared. Not unlike in sports when we need to put on our pads and cleats so that we can play with confidence that we will not slip or be injured. Or when we study to prepare for a test.

Unfortunately, unlike God, these things are not perfect and we sometimes slip, get kicked above the pad, or do poorly on a test despite studying. So Ephesians tells us the perfect armor of God is made up of truth, righteousness, proclamation, faith, and the word of God.

Tuesday in the Third Week of Advent December 19

Psalm 125

2 Kings 2:9-22

Acts 3:17 – 4:4

Peter Plaschka

We live in very uncertain times where politics and people's views take very unexpected turns. With this new evolution of social media and "fake news" one doesn't know who to listen to or what to believe anymore. The world is more divided than ever before, not just across countries or religions but within communities and families. I was never one to get into deep political discussions because I have my own view on things that a single party cannot represent, but with what is going on I feel compelled to express my anger and disappointment.

What can you believe? Where do you find the truth?

The only consistent truth is the Word of God. As stated in Acts 3:22, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.' Christ is remarkable, exemplary, someone I admire and look up to. Christ always told the truth and always referred to the Word of God, especially when things got tough.

So what I am basically saying, instead of letting the media and fake news confuse and clutter our minds, we need to refer back to the Bible to find the truth and some common ground.

Wednesday in the Third Week of Advent December 20

Psalm 125

Malachi 3:16 – 4:6

Mark 9:9-13

Pamela Riddle

A wonderful teach-colleague of mine from Arizona spoke what I know in my heart to be true - of the actual ministry music/song can be.

As I stewed over the gloom and doom of the world today – the wickedness in it, and as referenced in the readings assigned, I didn't see how there was an Advent connection.

In the wee hours of one morning came to me, however, the spiritual, Sing Hallelujah!, here somewhat edited, as I recollect it from a high school NYS School Music Association choir gathering (originally from Funny Lady with Barbra Streisand).

When you're down and out
Lift us your head and shout
There's gonna be a great day!
Angels in the sky
Promise that by and by
There's gonna be a great day.
If you believe He will receive you – Amen!
Gabriel will warn you
Some early morn
You will hear his horn
It's not far away.
Lift up your head and say
There's gonna be a great day!

Thursday in the Third Week of Advent

December 21

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26

2 Samuel 6:1-11

Hebrews 1:1-4

Tim Beirne

*I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.
(Psalm 89:4)*

Advent provides a time within the church calendar when we learn to wait. The awesome promise of Immanuel, God with us, is matched only by the awesome anticipation with which we wait. Yet most of us wait so poorly, especially at this time of year.

Around the holidays, we have been conditioned to think of waiting in one of two ways. First, waiting is characterized by impatience. In a world designed to provide instant gratification, advent can feel like an unwelcome anachronism. We already know the end of this story, no need to drag things out. Why dedicate weeks of services to somber longing when the rest of the world chimes out jingle bells?

Second, we wait anxiously. We imagine the perfect Christmas, a flawless yuletide. We plan and prepare for the holiday meal, the idyllic Christmas morning, the harmonious family gathering. Presents are hunted down, meals carefully planned and the tree pristinely decorated all in the hopes

that this year the day itself will live up to the hype. Many of us have grown wise enough in the ways of the world to regard the Hallmark ideal with a degree of skepticism, but we still hold out for a day that might meet our expectation of love and goodwill in some small way.

Inevitably, fear and disappointment cloud our thoughts. Memories of hurt, loss or regret threaten to temper our expectations and drive us to seek protection in the cloak of cynicism or indifference. In our anxiety and impatience, we are tempted to cry out with the psalmist “How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?”. Year after year, we find that the realization of our desires is just beyond our reach. We are tempted to despair. Maybe the whole season isn’t really worth our time in the first place. Perhaps it’s all an exercise in futility, a human convention without any real meaning or purpose of its own. Yet, scripture commands that we wait. We are promised in Isaiah that “they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” So, how can we wait well? What would that look like?

In *The Path of Waiting*, Henry Nouwen reminds us that the key to proper longing is exchanging desire for hope. Living in hope forces us to forget about our own expectations and to live in possibility. As Nouwen explains, “To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. It is trusting that something will happen to us that is far beyond our own imaginings. It is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life.” Rather than allowing ourselves to be hemmed in by the tyranny of our own impossible standards, waiting in hope provides the courage to live a life of faith. We are free from a perfection that demands no compromises or shortcomings in the fulfillment of each and every desire. We are free to pursue a perfection that is rightly ordered as we strive to become that which we were created to be.

David Foster Wallace once said that the real value of a liberal arts education meant “learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience.” In a similar fashion, being a created thing and living a life a faith means being conscious and aware enough of our own desires so that we may rightly align our desires with the creator’s will. In this advent season, may God’s grace allow us the courage to live in open-ended hope, forsaking all else, in anticipation of Christ’s coming.

Friday in the Third Week of Advent

December 22

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

2 Samuel 6:12-19

Hebrews 1:5-14

Thomas Mauro

These readings remind me of family, and the history and generations of where I came from. At Thanksgiving we will have the whole family together. This will be the first one without Sitoo, so I'm sure there will be lots of stories of when everyone was younger, including me. I like hearing these stories. It helps me know who I am and who I want to be.

Saturday in the Third Week of Advent

December 23

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Judges 13:2-24

John 7:40-52

Debbie Sepulveda

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

This Psalm was written to describe the reign of David. God promised to make David the mightiest King on earth. But Jerusalem was destroyed and Kings no longer reigned. So these verses look forward to the future reign of Jesus. David is promised to have God's power to accomplish God's will. Without God's help we are weak and powerless to accomplish the simplest spiritual tasks. But when we are filled with God's Spirit anything is possible. I believe all of our dreams are a gift from God. We must remain faithful even without the evidence of proof. We may be faced with fear, feelings of inadequacy, opposition from others, insecurity and more. But with God's Grace and Love for his children nothing is impossible. God would not have given us a dream in our heart if we did not have everything we need to achieve it.

Judges 13:2-24

This reading is about the birth of Samson. Samson was born to Manoah and his wife. His wife was unable to become pregnant and they had no children. The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and said "Even though you have been unable to have children you will soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. So be careful ; you must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink nor eat any forbidden food. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines." The Lord's Angel appeared a second time answering Manoah's wives prayer since he only appeared before her and not her husband. Manoah asked the Angels name, but the Angel said "His name was a mystery beyond understanding and too wonderful to imagine." Sometimes we ask God questions and we do not receive an answer. We maybe asking for knowledge beyond our ability to understand or accept. For me many times in my life I have asked why someone I love is going through so much, I just don't understand it is hard for me to accept. So I put it in God's hands. Maybe there are things that touch our heart. These maybe times when God wants to use us. Maybe work at being more in tune

with the Holy Spirit leading and the tasks that God has prepared for us. Our past maybe more useful than we think.

Samson was to be a Nazirite for Life. Samson's parents made this vow for him before he was born. As a Nazirite Samson could not cut his hair, touch a dead body or drink anything containing alcohol. Samson often used poor judgment and sinned but he accomplished a lot when he determined to be set apart for God, in this way he was similar to Israel. When the Israelites remained set apart for God the nation thrived, but they fell into sin when they ignored God.

John 7:40-52

In this Reading Jesus traveled around Galilee, he wanted to stay out of Judea where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death, it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters and Jesus' brothers said to him "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such things, show yourself to the world." Even his brothers didn't believe in him. Jesus' brothers had a hard time believing. They were embarrassed by Jesus. After Jesus died and rose again they finally believed. Today we have every reason to believe because we have full record of Jesus' miracles, death and resurrection. We also have evidence of what the Good News has done in peoples lives.

Jesus' replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go but you can go anytime, The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil." Jesus stayed in Galilee and stayed out of sight. Half way through the festival Jesus began to teach. The crowd was asking questions about Jesus, some believed, some were hostile and others disqualified Jesus as Messiah because he was from Nazareth not Bethlehem. But he was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. If they had looked more carefully they would not have jumped to the wrong conclusions. When we search for God's truth we must look carefully and thoughtfully at the Bible with an open heart. Even the Temple Guards could not find one reason to arrest Jesus as they listened to Jesus to try and find evidence, they couldn't help hearing the wonderful words he said.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 24

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Luke 1:46b-55

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Jeremy Reisenauer

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' (Luke 1: 26-28)



Christmas' Day; Nativity of the Lord

December 25

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

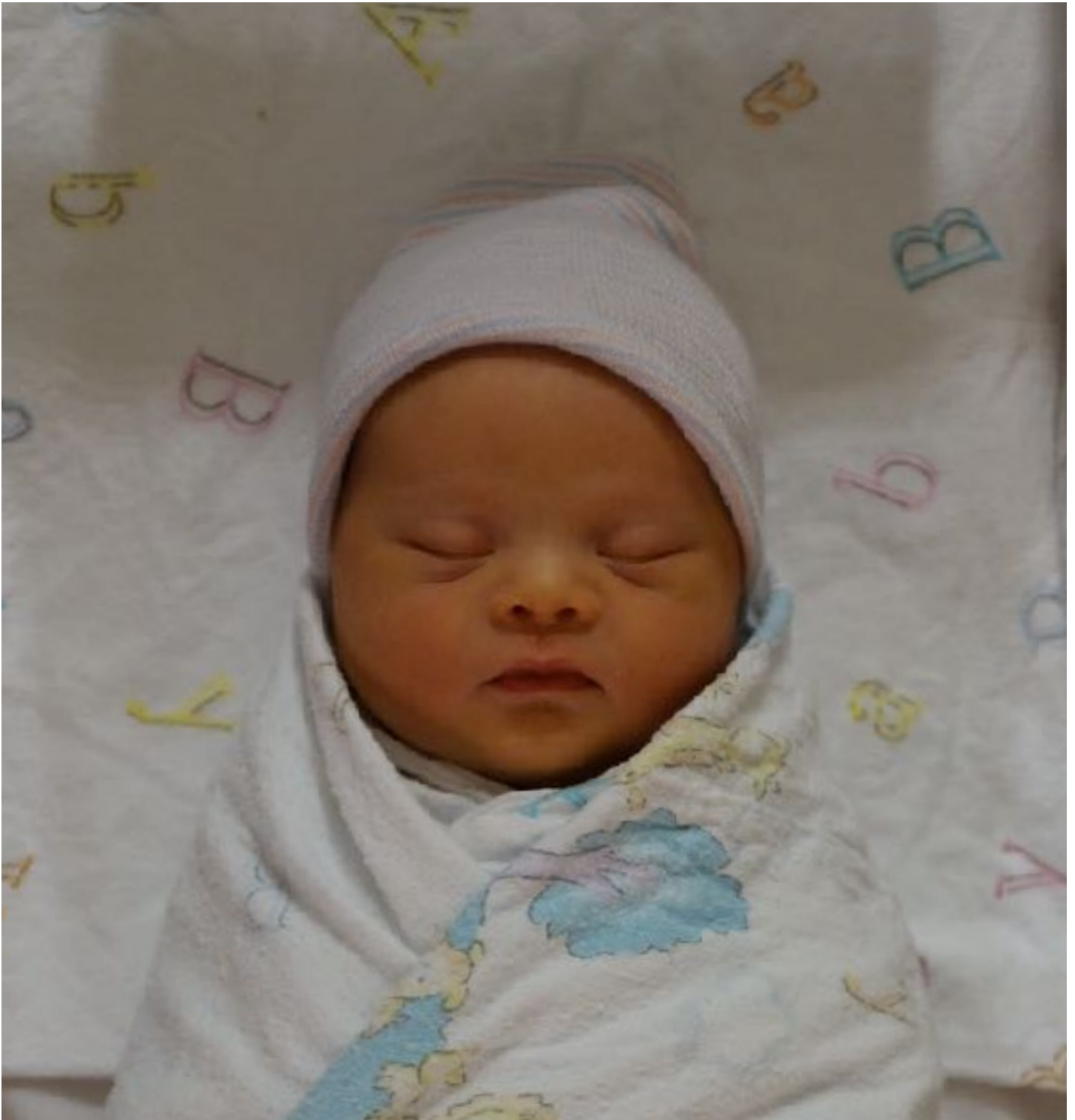
Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

Fjeril Deal

Jesus was born in a stable, because there was no room for Mary & Joseph at the Inn. Shepherds were in the fields keeping watch over their flocks & an angel stood before them & said Do not be afraid I am bring you good news of great joy for all the people. to you is born this day in the city of David a

Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. You will find the child wrapped in cloth & lying in a manger. So they went in haste & found Mary & Joseph & the child lying in the manger. The shepherds returned, glorifying & praising God.



Phineas Alwyn Linzee, on the day of his birth.

Tuesday in Christmas' week

December 26

Psalm 148

Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15

Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60

Pola Lanzaro

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;

praise him in the heights! (Psalm 148:1)



The earth is the Lord's and all it contains.

Wednesday in Christmas week

December 27

Psalm 148

Exodus 33:18-23

John 1:1-9

Ruth and Ken LeCluse

John chapter 1 describes John the Baptist. It has been said that John the Baptist was sent to prepare the world for the coming of the Lord (Mark 1:4).

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the ...true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world.

(John 1:6-7, 9)

Whenever we hear the song from Godspell, "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord," it reminds us of our experiences with the Long Island Episcopal Cursillo and a mission trip to Barbados. Sixty Cursillistas (those who have been on a Cursillo weekend) from St. James, Caroline Church in Setauket, St. Mark's in Islip, and numerous other churches in the Diocese of Long Island travelled to Codrington College, the Theological College of the Church of the Province of the West Indies that dates back to the eighteenth century, to bring the Cursillo movement to the Caribbean Islands. The

Cursillo movement is designed to further understand your Christian beliefs, enforce your path to follow Christ, and to enjoy the Holy Spirit as it enfolds your life and helps you to prepare the way of the Lord in this world.

Father Eddie Alleyne, a Cursillo director from Brooklyn who is originally from Barbados (our “John the Baptist”), envisioned bringing a Cursillo weekend to his homeland in an attempt to strengthen the Episcopal Church among Islanders. The closing Eucharist was held in a tent overlooking the edge of the western sea and led by the Bishop of the Caribbean Islands. It was attended by over 150 people from Barbados and the surrounding islands. Suddenly overhead, a large rainbow (symbol of the Cursillo movement) appeared. – certainly a sign of the Holy Spirit. Today, the Cursillo movement is alive and well in the Caribbean and they continue preparing the way of the Lord.

We too must continue to “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” as we live our daily lives.

Thursday in Christmas week

December 28

Psalm 148

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Matthew 2:13-18

Amy Jeffrey



François-Joseph Navez, “Massacre of the Innocents,” 1824.

Reflection question: What place does grieving play in the advent season?

Psalm 148

Isaiah 49:5-15

Matthew 12:46-50

*I will turn all my mountains into a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.
Lo, these shall come from far away,
and lo, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene. (Isaiah 49:11-12)*

Called to Say Yes

We are called to say yes.
That the kingdom might break through
To renew and to transform
Our dark and groping world.

We stutter and we stammer
To the lone God who calls
And pleads a New Jerusalem
In the bloodied Sinai Straights.

We are called to say yes
That honeysuckle may twine
And twist its smelling leaves
Over the graves of nuclear arms.

We are called to say yes
That children might play
On the soil of Vietnam where the tanks
Belched blood and death.

We are called to say yes
That black may sing with white
And pledge peace and healing
For the hatred of the past.

We are called to say yes
So that nations might gather
And dance one great movement
For the joy of humankind.

We are called to say yes
So that rich and poor embrace
And become equal in their poverty
Through the silent tears that fall.

We are called to say yes

That the whisper of our God
Might be heard through our sirens
And the screams of our bombs.

We are called to say yes
To a God who still holds fast
To the vision of the Kingdom
For a trembling world of pain.

We are called to say yes
To this God who reaches out
And asks us to share
His crazy dream of love.

From Edwina Gateley, There Was No Path So I Trod One (1996, 2013)

Saturday in Christmas week

December 30

Psalms 148

Proverbs 9:1-12

2 Peter 3:8-13

Igor Sepulveda

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10)*

Through these twelve proverbs of wisdom, we acquire one of the biggest gifts a human being could ever attain. God provides this resource of wisdom for us to encounter life knowledge to better show who we are in relationship to other people. Wisdom comes to us in different forms. Similar to building a castle with strong pillars, wisdom could prevail and be passed on to generations to come.

There is a beneficial sacrifice that comes when living a life that is not simple, but rather committed to use wisdom, applying this gift among people in our lives such as family members, friends, co-workers, even new people that cross our path. Wisdom comes when you understand instead of being understood, when you give instead of receive, when you do not impose on other people that you are correct all the time, being empathetic in anyone's hard situation, promoting harmony and love in other people's lives.

There is so much to gain and so little to lose.

Sunday after Christmas

December 31

Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3

Psalms 148

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:22-40

Frank Giardina

Galatians 4: 4-7 "God sent forth his son ... to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts"

The church is the "body of Christ", not the institution - NO - rather it is comprised of the individuals into whom God graciously sends his own son's spirit. This, it could be said is the ground of Christian hope. It is God placing his own spirit in "man" allowing for an adoption that gives mankind hope.

Since the first Easter, this is the state into which we are all born and where we begin our life's journey, during which we pray we are granted the most precious of all gifts - God's fellowship through his son's spirit.

*Monday in the second week of Christmas
Holy Name of Jesus/New Year's Day*

January 1

Numbers 6:22-27

Psalm 8

Galatians 4:4-7 or Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 2:15-21

Amy Jeffrey

The Lord is good!

As we begin this new year, perhaps having made several New Year's resolutions, let us resolve to remember these things:

- ❖ That the Lord wants to bless us and be gracious to us.
- ❖ That the Lord, Creator and Sovereign over all the earth, is mindful of us and caring towards us.
- ❖ That we are adopted children of God and He is our Abba father.
- ❖ That all is well because of the babe born in Bethlehem.

Tuesday in the second week of Christmas

January 2

Psalm 148

Proverbs 1:1-7

James 3:13-18

CharlieENZ

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. (James 3:13)

I am white, male, of northern European (German) and Irish-English parents, raised protestant, in the vernacular a WASP, with a degree in engineering and a master's degree in business administration, clearly above average in intelligence and education. I grew up in Northern New Jersey where I had easy access to many local colleges at a time when college tuition was low

enough I could pay for it with summer jobs. 50% of my lifetime income is due to the accident of birth and not merit, skill, or diligence on my part. We live in a time when prominent figures and groups denigrate others because of skin color, country of origin, choice of life partners, sex, or religion.

A grandfather talking to his grandson says there are two wolves inside us always at war with each other, one is a good wolf that represents kindness, compassion, bravery and love. The other a bad wolf that represents greed, bigotry, hatred, and fear. The child thinks a moment, then asks "Grandfather, which one wins?" His Grandfather replies "The one you feed the most."

Skin pigmentation is determined by variations in eight genes out of 20,000 in our DNA and race is therefore an artificial construct. Unless your heritage precedes the Norse discovery of the Americas about the year 1000 we are all Johnny-come-lately immigrants with no claim to a long heritage. Our forefathers largely stole, killed, or cheated out of their birthright those who arrived over 10,000 years ago and validly claim that heritage. I have dealt with people whose pride of place is based on descending from Mayflower arrivals with a blunt reminder their religious views were unwelcome in England and Holland, they came here, and were equally intolerant of the religions of others.

Approximately 2-3% of people are gay. Given many of us are married twice and on average have two children this means there is about a 10% chance we have one gay child by blood or marriage.

Before my daughter was born I recognized women were not treated equally. After she was born it was real, not an intellectual belief. White women make 79%, black woman 69%, a Latina woman with a college degree fares worst - 63% of what a white non-Hispanic man makes for the same job with the same education and experience.

The Koran, Torah, and Old Testament originate from the same older sources. Every major religion has its version of the golden rule. For Muslims it is the words of the prophet Muhammed "He is not a believer who does not wish for others that which he wishes for himself." I have family and friends I love, work I enjoy doing, a daughter and granddaughter I am deeply proud of, a girlfriend to whom I have written warm love letters, good health, and financial security. Life doesn't get much better.

The only certainty we each have is now, this present moment that passes through us, so long as we live, faster than we can speak its name. I choose to live life now, happy or sad now, hurt or joyful now, enjoy the son's warmth now, share a bottle of wine and conversation with a friend now, the pleasure of a woman's company now, live without regrets now, hope and

work for a better future now, but accepting what the future brings good or bad.

Yesterday is a fading memory, tomorrow a hope for a future I may never see. Live now, all else is folly.

We live by love, by grace, by art, and none come easily. While yet we draw breath let us give to each other a love that graces life and makes art out of living. Let this be our great covenant, to live together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

Immanuel Kant: "Rules for Happiness: Something to do, someone to love, something to hope for."

George Santayana: "Religion in its humility restores man to his only dignity, the courage to live by grace."

Hafez (Persian, 1315-1390): "I have come into the world to see this: the sword drop from men's hands, even at the height of their arc of rage, because we have finally realized there is but one flesh we can wound."

Wednesday in the second week of Christmas January 3

Psalm 110

Proverbs 1:20-33

James 4:1-10

Margo Goodman

James 4:1-10

"What causes war, and what causes fightings among you?"

This is a question my late husband, Don, and I pondered for years and attempted to "do something about". We eventually became involved for ten years with a program called "Alternatives to Violence" (AVP). This was a program that started between prisoners in a Maximum Security Prison, Greenhaven, Stormville, NY. and Quaker volunteers from outside prison. We were trained by outside and inside prisoner participants. We became facilitators and would plan monthly three day workshops with outside and inside prisoner facilitators. We learned, despite the often horrific crimes committed by the prisoners in the program workshops, that basically if "you look for the good" it was there. Bridges were built between the inmates, mostly people of color. and the outside participants. mostly white. Don and I learned a lot about "what causes fightings" in ourselves and others, as did the inmate members, many of whom we would meet after prison, their having been paroled, released.

This last weekend I was the delegate from our church to the Episcopal Convention for the Diocese of Long Island, which includes Brooklyn and

Queens. Honestly, this was the first roomful of people i have found myself in, since those AVP workshops, where there was a sizable and pretty equal portion of People of Color and whites sitting together. I was truly impressed by this, observing such a difference from the churches of my youth which were so separated racially, causing me to seek Catholicism as an alternative with seemingly much more racially mixed congregations, at least then, in the '50s and '60s. The big round tables at the Melville Marriott were filled with both groups, not separated into tables seating one race or the other.

If we can see others as similar to us generally but different in interesting ways as well, us and not us, really open to both and accepting, then what causes fightings and war is diminished.

Thursday in the second week of Christmas

January 4

Psalm 110

Proverbs 3:1-12

James 4:11-17

The Jeffrey family



This is the irrational season
When love blooms bright and wild.
Had Mary been filled with reason
There'd had been no room for the child

.
But now is the hour
When I remember
An infant's power
On a cold December.
Midnight is dawning
And the birth of wonder.

Madeline L'Engle

Friday in the second week of Christmas

January 5

Psalm 110

Proverbs 22:1-9

Luke 6:27-31

Jennifer Lawrence

*But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.
Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
Give to everyone who begs from you;
and if someone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.
Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)*

As strife is rampant around the world, in our country and even closer to home on Long Island, how transformative would it be if we could love our enemy? It is hard to imagine loving those who hate us and want to harm us. Perhaps it is more doable to “do to others as you would have them do to you” and not make enemies of people. Generosity, love and prayer. With God’s grace, may there be more who listen, more who give and more who pray – especially for our enemies.

Epiphany of the Lord

January 6

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Alex Rich

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth...
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you...
Lift up your eyes round about you and see. (Isaiah 60:1-6)*

It has taken me the better part of my life to recognize and find true comfort in the light glowing incandescently in the darkness. The light of the star in the East has always been more transparent, more easily identified and embraced. The light in the darkness is just as brilliant once we finally see it and hold it to our hearts. With prayer and deep faith we can finally bathe in an ever more encompassing light as we lift our eyes to our Lord.

St. James' Episcopal Church

490 North Country Road

St. James, New York 11780

Office phone: 631 584 5560

Email: stjamesc@optonline.net

Website: stjamesstjames.org