

Thursday, December 10

Isaiah 41.17-18

A reflection.

God knows that from time to time each of us is in need of something. He also knows that there are many people who, for all sorts of reason, are in need all the time. The poor and the needy are everywhere. They are on the streets of Mobile, they are in our schools, they are even in our churches. God knows that there are people in need, and he promises to help them. When God makes a promise, it isn't like when you or I make a promise. We say we'll do something hoping that we'll really be able to do it. When God promises something it is true even as he says it.

God promises that the poor will find water to drink and it is true. God's promise is sure because God has set aside people, like you and like me, who are able to reach out and offer a cup of water or a sandwich or whatever to help those in need. God wants his people, be it the people of Israel or you and me, to fulfill his promises by caring for the poor and needy.

A Prayer.

God, when you speak, things happen. Help me to be your hands and your feet so that your promise of comfort to the poor and the needy can be as true today as when you first said it through the prophet Isaiah so many years ago. Do this so that people who do not know you might see your power at work in the world around them. I ask it in the name of Jesus who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

*The Rev. Steve Pankey is the Curate at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Foley. He is married to Cassie and they have a seven-month old daughter, Eliza. Steve moved to Foley in June of 2007 after he and Ben and many others graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary. He loves to boat and is a huge Pittsburgh Steelers fan.*

Friday, December 11

Psalm 1

A reflection.

I think something all of us would like to know is how we can live a prosperous life. As I reflect on these passages, I find myself slowly realizing that living a prosperous life is simple to understand, yet difficult to master! There is one phrase that continued to stick out for me as I reflected on these passages, and over time, I found myself realizing how fundamental this concept was to living a healthy, prosperous Christian life, but this concept is often overlooked and easily forgotten in the busyness of our daily lives. Yet, even when we are busy, if we can keep this concept in mind and practice it, we will attain that which we seek; a fun, happy, meaningful and prosperous life.

Let's turn to the first Psalm: "Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night." 'Day and night,' sounds pretty constant right? Well, it is, but they also prospered for it. But, before the 'day and night' sinks in too deep and we write this off too quickly (because it is impossible to focus on something 24/7), we need to remember that God isn't looking for perfection; God is looking for intention and action.

Think about what you enjoy in your life. Sports, video games, studying, playing games with friends, spending time with your family or maybe reading a book by yourself. Now think about the things in your life that you don't enjoy. At every moment in our lives, good, bad, or neutral, we have the opportunity to share what we are doing and feeling with God and to bring everything to God. It is kind of like checking-in with Jesus on a constant basis. If we can live our lives and do everything focused on God, regardless of what it is, we will find ourselves developing a deeper relationship with God and on our way to living a prosperous life.

And yes we are going to mess up and forget on the way, but again, Jesus isn't looking for perfection, Jesus is looking for right intention. By doing so, we might find ourselves loving life that much more because we know and feel ourselves being loved by God.

A Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to remember you in everything I think, say and do. When I am happy, remind me to share this with you. When I am sad, remind me to talk with you. Guide my steps by transforming my life to include you in everything I do, and forgive my forgetfulness; for you are a God who understands I am not perfect on my own, but only perfect through you. Amen.

*The Rev. Tim Backus is a recent graduate from Virginia Theological Seminary and is serving as Minister to Youth and Young Adults at Christ Church, Pensacola, FL. Before Seminary, Tim lived most of his life in North Carolina and attended Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, graduating in 2005 with a B.M. in Music Therapy and a B.S. in Psychology. Tim has a deep passion for music and loves playing the guitar and anything that looks or sounds like a drum. He also has a strong interest in connecting with people through sports, movies and games, which is a good thing since he can't seem to get enough of any of these.*

**Saturday, December 12**

Matthew 17:9-13

### A Reflection.

I remember the first time I saw the movie *The Matrix*. I got to the theater about ten minutes late, so I was extremely confused. In fact, it wasn't until the end of the movie that I finally started to understand what was going on, and even then I had all these questions. That's a little like what the disciples feel like when they're talking to Jesus in today's reading from Matthew. They're confused about how the prophet Elijah fits into the story of the messiah, but their confusion could just as easily be about any number of things.

Sometimes things don't make sense until afterward. Actually, most of the time the big, important events of life—the painful ones, or poignant ones, or really significant ones—just sort of happen to us, and it's not until later that we have time and space to figure out what's going on. The thing is: nowhere in the Bible does Jesus say everything is going to make sense, not to us. He doesn't promise that we'll get everything on the first "viewing," and walk away from the theater without any questions. But we do believe he's in charge. We do believe he's above it all, and at the end of the day, I figure I've just got to trust that he knows how all these loose strings will tie up in the end to make a great story. Are you willing to let go of needing everything to "make sense," and be willing to trust him, too?

### A Prayer.

God of all that was, is, or ever will be, help me to let go of my need to always be in the know, and let you be in charge. I want to trust you, but I can only do it with your help. So help me. Amen.

*The Rev. R. Casey Shobe is the Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Narragansett, Rhode Island. He is married to the Rev. Melody Shobe, and they have a three-month old daughter, Isabelle.*

**Wednesday, December 9**

Isaiah 40:25-31

### A Reflection.

An eagle chick fell out of its nest and was found by a farmer. The farmer gave the young eagle chick to a mother hen who raised it on his farm. As the young eagle grew, it behaved just like all the other chickens. It ate grain, it lived in a small enclosure, and it didn't fly, because chickens don't fly. As time went by, the young eagle began to flap his wings all the time, annoying many of the other animals on the farm. Then one day a strong wind blew just as the eagle spread his wings. The wind caught the young eagle's wings and lifted him out of the compound into the open spaces. The animals went crazy! The uproar on the farm was so loud that the farmer came running. The farmer said, "I wondered how long it would be before you discovered the truth. After all, you are an eagle! You are designed to soar high wherever the wind will take you!"

It's far too easy to feel like you're alone. It's far too easy to think that you will never be understood. It's far too easy to let life float along without ever spreading your wings to fly, but flying is what you are made to do. Becoming who you were meant to be – becoming fully you, and only you – is what you are meant to be. Becoming who you were meant to be is why God sent his only son, Jesus, to be a person like you. Jesus knows what it's like to feel alone, but Jesus' promise is that we are never really alone. We are surrounded by the love of God, whether we know it or not. Open your arms and your heart to the love of God all around you – spread your wings and fly.

### A prayer.

O God, you know my heart and my mind, you know my secrets and my dreams. Give me the courage to be everything you made me to be and the strength to do it with love. Make me an instrument of your will in the world. This I ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Christopher Girata is Associate Rector at Saint Luke's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Chris is married to Nicole and they have two beautiful, energetic children, Brayden and Layna, and one yappy little dog, Zoey.*

Tuesday, December 8

Isaiah 40:1-11

### A Reflection.

If you had to comfort someone, how would you do it? Maybe you would give them a hug, tell them everything is going to be all right or try to explain away their troubles, shift their mood, helping them to see the bright side. There are so many ways we comfort one another: comfort food, comfort zones, our very coziest comfortable clothes, a gesture or a touch, a smile or a song. George F. Handel, in his masterpiece *Messiah*, expressed comfort with a note – one single, sweet, welcoming note that floats out of the singer’s voice with all of the warmth and reassurance of your favorite soft sweatshirt.

For the prophet Isaiah, comfort comes with a word. Isaiah’s God-given word is that Jerusalem’s sins have been forgiven, that God is preparing a path for the people of Israel in the midst of the wilderness. God loves his people so much that He will flatten mountains and fill in valleys to make their walk with Him easier. God loves His people with a fierce and reassuring love that will never fail them. God, who prompts His prophet Isaiah to speak such a word of comfort to His beloved chosen people, has the same passionate love for you. When you have lost your way and can see only darkness, God will find you and gather you up in His arms; He will feed you with truth and clothe you in righteousness and sing to you holy songs of great sweetness. “The mouth of the Lord has spoken,” and that mouth has spoken, is speaking, and will forever speak, a word of comfort.

### A Prayer.

Mighty and merciful God, who spoke a word of truth and of love through your prophet Isaiah, help us to hear you when you speak to us; quiet our hearts and minds that we may hear the song of comfort that you sing into our souls, that we may go forth and lift up our voices with strength to proclaim your love to the world; through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

*The Rev. Erika Takacs is the Associate Rector for Faith Formation and evangelism at Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia. She is a 2007 graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary.*

Monday, December 14

Psalm 25:3-8  
Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a  
Matthew 21:23-27

### A Reflection.

Psalm 25 reminds us that no matter where we may be on our own journey, God is not only a destination, but is also with us, guiding us and providing for us at all times. Beyond being a destination and a guide, God is also a teacher, showing us his ways, laying down paths for us at all times. God cares about us deeply, and even when we find ourselves wandering from the path, God creates paths back to the straight and narrow. God loves us, and out of this love for us has cut the brush and cleared the razor sharp rocks from our way. The way of God is one that He has provided for us, and even as we may walk a difficult path, God is with us, providing for us, and guiding us at all times.

In Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a we hear of Balaam’s third and final oracle, or speech. In it, Balaam proclaims that even in a dark and dreary and dry time, God will offer blessings of light and hope and abundance. Balaam looks upon the nation of Israel in a time of turmoil and pain but sees a vision in which God will provide for those in need. We all walk through times in our lives when it seems that there might be no improvement, when we can’t really see a way out of trouble, but the Bible reminds us that God does provide a way out. Balaam sees that for those who are thirsty, “water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall have abundant water.” If you’ve ever been hiking and run out of water on a hot day, you know the relief when you find a stream. God provides water for us like a stream of rushing water in a desert.

In Matthew 21:23-27, Jesus is preaching in the Temple, and the authorities come up to him and start to give him a hard time. They doubt whether he has any right to speak there. They doubt his authority. In essence, they think that he has no connection to God, and that everyone needs to go through them, and see things the way that they do. This passage is helpful because we see that in Jesus and through Jesus we have access to God. No longer do we need religious authorities to get between us and God. The way to God and the way of Jesus is open to us, and we have been given the authority to pray, to worship, and to proclaim our faith. Jesus empowers us to engage fully with God, and this is a gift indeed.

### A Prayer.

Almighty God, you have provided water for the thirsty and have charted out pathways for the lost in times past. Give us water when we are parched, and guide us when we are lost, and help us to realize that you have given us the authority to seek you, to pray to you, and to proclaim our faith in you. We thank you for providing for us in the past, may we also do your work in the world as we strive to provide for those in need. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The Rev. Peter M. Carey is currently the Associate Rector of a church in rural Virginia where he oversees a whole lot of the church’s ministry and is so lucky to be working alongside wonderful lay and ordained leaders. He was a teacher and coach for 10 years before seminary spending time working in NC, DC, PA, and Virginia and is blessed with a wonderful wife and three children under the age of 7.*

**Tuesday, December 15**

Psalm 34:1-8

### A Reflection.

December 15th! Almost to Christmas break! It's not easy being a student. There are pressures and fears all over the place. Even when a break is just around the corner, stress can pile up. Whenever we are in trouble, fear, need or doubt God has promised to be present with us.

Psalm 34 is a song of praise to God for deliverance from trouble. God promises to be with us in times of trouble and when we get through those time it is very appropriate to offer God thanks. Verse 4 proclaims, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." Sometimes when we get out of a bad situation it is tempting to want to put the whole thing behind us. Yet if we have asked for God's help, it is only right that we take the time to acknowledge God's provision and to thank God. This is the perfect opportunity (and a really good Psalm) to share our faith with other people as well. In verse 8 we hear, "Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the person who takes refuge in God." When we have experienced the joy of God's provision and protection we should be empowered to share that joy with others and invite them to "taste and see" that the Lord is good.

### A Prayer.

Abba Father, today we bless your name for your promise to deliver us in times of trouble. Help us to remember you when in distress and after you have delivered us and to share with others that we are blessed when we take refuge in you. Amen.

*Eric Liles is Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Smiths Station, AL. He lives in Opelika, AL with his wife Allison, son Hill and dog Scout.*

**Monday, December 7**

Isaiah 35:1-10

### A Reflection.

Back when your grandparents were traveling to places like Pensacola and New Orleans the best way to go east or west out of Mobile was U.S. Highway 90. Looking at these roads with something like Google Earth or Mapquest, you'll notice places where the old highway was washed away by the storm surge of Hurricane Katrina. Memorial Bridge in Biloxi was gone; travelers had to use another way to go from one side of Biloxi Bay to the other. The same was true a little further west towards New Orleans, but now the people of Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian have a new award-winning bridge.

Bridges and roads connect us, making it so that we can go from place to place with ease. They keep us from feeling isolated. The better the road, the more likely we'll use them. Back in the day that the prophet Isaiah was preaching the roads around and through what we now call the Holy Land were mostly winding and twisty trails that were either washed away by seasonal rains or covered by the desert winds with sand. Most roads could not be relied on to be the same year in and year out. Some roads were just plain dangerous. Everybody knew what it was like to be isolated and without resources. If someone were sick or injured there would be no way to get them help. People just stayed home if they could.

So it makes sense that when Isaiah wants to tell us about how things will be when God's dream for us comes true, he tells us about a road built on top of a world where everything works, all life is thriving, and all the bad stuff is gone. This will be a holy way.

During this season of Advent we are encouraged to use our imaginations and dream along with God about how much better the world can be. We join in with Isaiah's great anticipation of the difference God can make and dream our own dreams about Jesus being born, and not just the baby Jesus but the man he becomes, the man whose life death and resurrection rebuilds the bridges and makes a Holy Way for everyone of us and for our world so that "no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray."

### A Prayer.

Most merciful and loving God, you have made the way holy by the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ and have invited us to come to you rejoicing on the way. Help us to be a holy people willing to keep the way clear for others so they might find the blessing that is your dream for all you have made. We ask this looking forward to living with your son who is our judge and redeemer, Jesus our Lord. Amen

*I am Dann Brown, chaplain at UGA. I have been a priest since 1994 and I have served in different places, all in Georgia. I know Fr. Ben from when he was a schoolboy in Waynesboro, GA. I also had the good fortune to know his wife Erin and to be part of the crowd that helped them to get married. I love being a college chaplain and hope I get to stay in Athens for a long time.*

Saturday, December 5

Psalm 147:1-12

### A Reflection.

There are some songs that just get into my head, and I can't get them out. Sometimes it's triggered by an experience, or maybe someone will say something that reminds me of a song that I know or that I've heard. Sometimes a song jumps into my head and takes up residence in there, and I can't get it out of my mind for anything. Most of the time this happens because I've heard it on a commercial for one of those compilation CDs that get advertised on TV. Right now that song is, "Our God is an awesome God" because today's Psalm is such an amazing reminder of how great our God is.

The psalmist reminds us of all of the wonderful and amazing things God can do for us and for everyone around us. God heals the brokenhearted, and God bandages their wounds. God counts all of the stars (me and you), and God knows us all by name. God provides food and shelter and rain. All the things that we have have been given to us by God. Because of all these things that God does for us, we are compelled to give thanks to Him. We are compelled to sing praises, and we can take joy in honoring him.

These weeks of Advent give us that opportunity. These weeks help us to realize how fortunate we are to have a God who is so wonderful and loving to us. These weeks give us a chance to focus on God and to sing "Hallelujah!" to Him.

### A Prayer.

Loving God, we know that it is your will that we all be cared for and nurtured. Grant us the grace to recognize that we are to care for and nurture others as you care for and nurture us. In the name of your Son and the Holy Spirit we ask this always. Amen.

*The Reverend Ben Rockwell serves as curate at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church. He has a great wife, two kids, and helps to lead an exciting and energetic EYC.*

Wednesday, December 16

Isaiah 45:5-25

### A Reflection.

Our God is a God who chooses unlikely people and uses them to do unlikely things. We see this again and again throughout the Biblical text. From Moses the stutterer to David the shepherd and Rahab the prostitute to Mary the unwed teenage mother, God uses unexpected people to do God's work in the world. This chapter of Isaiah is about how God chooses Cyrus, a foreigner who doesn't even believe in the one true God, to accomplish God's work in the world. Cyrus is the leader of Persia, a foreign land. The people of Israel are held captive in Babylon, but Cyrus conquers Babylon and then liberates the people of Israel. Someone who doesn't even believe in God does God's will, and he is praised and commemorated in the Bible for his actions.

The people of Israel are unsure. They question God's choice, God's wisdom in allowing this unexpected person to have such a vital role in the history of salvation. And God responds in no uncertain terms, with the words of Isaiah 45:11-13: "Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Will you questions me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight..." In other words, don't question who God chooses and who God uses. Our God, the one who made the universe, is an unexpected God. God can choose and use anyone: foreigners, sinners, strangers, doubters. Even, perhaps, you.

### A Prayer.

Holy One of Israel, we give thanks that you choose unexpected people to do extraordinary things. Help us to be willing to be used by you, in spite of our flaws and shortcomings, our failures and faults. You are the one who made us, and we are yours; give us the strength to serve you in all that we do. Amen.

*The Rev'd Melody Wilson Shobe is the associate rector of Christ Church, Lincoln. Married to another priest and mother to a beautiful 3 month old daughter, she is an unlikely, unexpected person who went to seminary straight out of college and was ordained at the age of 25. Melody is both excited and terrified by the prospect that God might choose to use her to do God's work in the world.*

## Thursday, December 17

Matthew 1:1-7, 17

### A Reflection.

So, who's your daddy? The Gospel of Matthew asks this question of Jesus in a VERY roundabout way with this seemingly endless list of fathers. Abraham and Isaac we know. But what about Amminadab and Nahshon? They don't get much play. We don't hear too much about them. But there they are, seven or eight generations closer to the birth of our Savior than Abraham. And here we are, 100 generations since the birth of the one who came to give us life, since he taught us to pray, "Our Father..."

So, who is Jesus' daddy? Well, same as yours; same as mine. God, the Almighty God. Who created heaven and earth; who called Abraham out of his decrepit and lonely wealth; who journeyed through the Red Sea with the children of Israel and took them all the way to the promised land. For all the generations, since the foundation of the world, this God has been our God, has been "Our Father." He calls us, like he called Abraham. He journeys with us, through the middle of the sea, and he will journey with us, all the way to the promised land and he'll be there with us when we get ourselves kicked out, over and over again.

### A Prayer.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you have made your love known to the world in the birth of your only Son. Give us grateful hearts that we might wait upon and receive with gladness every good thing that you have for us.

*Allen Pruitt is an Episcopal Priest in Great Falls, Virginia. He grew up Baptist, but didn't want to just fear God, but also love God. His hobbies include Georgia football, listening to Rufus Wainwright, and watching Squidbillies.*

## Friday, December 4

Isaiah 29:17-24

### A Reflection.

This reading from Isaiah reminds me of the Beatitudes in the New Testament when Jesus tells us that those who look like the losers in the world are really going to be the winners. In Isaiah we read that barren land will become fruitful, the deaf will hear, and the blind will see. The bullies will be put down and their victims will be vindicated. In God's world it is not those who are victorious by the world's current standards that are closest to God, but it is rather those of us who choose to live by a different standard – those of us who choose to use love to direct us in what we do and how we do it. This is not the easy path. As we await the birth of Jesus we are reminded that Jesus' life was the epitome of a life lived purely out of love, but that took him to the cross. As Isaiah tells us, we are God's beloved children. What looks so horrendous in this world must not be so bad in the larger cosmos that God works in. We are called, as Jesus showed us, to live our lives out of love: for friends and enemies, for our families, for ourselves, and especially for God. We are called to love as God loves and to trust God to take care of the rest.

### A Prayer.

Gracious and loving God: grant us your grace and power to hear what the world would have us turn a deaf ear to; to see into even the dark corners of your world and to be your agents of love helping to turn a barren land into one of fruitfulness and joy, that we may welcome you into our hearts, our deepest self as we await the incarnation; we ask all this in the name of the incarnate Son who chose to live among us, with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*My name is Candyce Loescher and I am rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Madisonville, Kentucky. I grew up in Memphis, TN, worked in art and sales before going to seminary and graduating with your own Fr. Ben. I thank you for the opportunity to share your journey through Advent, and hope to meet you all some time in the future. God's blessings on you all. Candyce+*

## Thursday, December 3

Isaiah 26.1-6

### A Reflection.

In verse 3, the Prophet Isaiah (talking about God) reminds us "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind stayed on you." Throughout the Scriptures, we are reminded that God's peace is greater than any power, any worry, any thing that exists. The perfect peace we are promised does not mean we will never face conflict or never be challenged. It does mean that we can be comforted in any situation: challenges in our friendships, difficulties in our family, our studies or work, the illness or loss of someone we love, or any other stressful circumstances. We can be comforted by knowing that God promises that we are loved and forgiven. As we trust God for our needs and invite God to be present in our minds, we ask him to be present in our thoughts and actions and to express his love in what we say and do.

It is difficult for any of us humans to keep our mind on God & God's hopes for us, but we are not alone in this. The Scriptures also tell us that God's own self will focus our mind on God and God's desires for us. You and I can live in the peace and the comfort of knowing that God is not going to let us get God off our minds. This is because we belong to God and are dearly loved by him. God never asks us to do anything alone, and he is always with us providing us with the strength to face the challenges we encounter. We are not alone. We are the beloved of God, the God who will give you peace and strength as you try to walk God's path. May God go within you, and remain with you always, to give you perfect peace.

### A Prayer.

Holy Comforter God, you have promised us a perfect peace. Help us to know and realize that while life will not always be easy, you will always be there with us. Help to know and remember that we are always beloved by You. In your name we pray always, Amen.

*The Rev'd Ron Owen is a lawyer turned priest in Jacksonville, Florida. He now serves as the Chief of Operations for FreshMinistries.*

## Friday, December 18

Matthew 1:18-25

### A Reflection

Joseph is a good man. Finding his future wife with child, instead of having her stoned for adultery or publicly shaming her, he intends to "dismiss her quietly." Joseph has no desire to do anything wrong; he is, as Matthew tells us, "a righteous man." But being good and righteous and not wanting to do a bad thing is not enough for God. God doesn't just want Joseph to not do the wrong thing; God wants Joseph to do the right thing. "Do not be afraid," the angel says to Joseph in his dream, "this is the will of God."

We often find ourselves in Joseph's position, as witnesses to or participants in situations where we can make a bad choice, a good choice, or choose to do nothing at all. We're good people, righteous people, so we aren't going to make the bad choice. But choosing to do nothing at all is no better than choosing to do the wrong thing, and that is not the will of God. Choosing to do the right thing can be painful or embarrassing. It can cost us more than effort; it can sometimes cost us friends and popularity. But "Don't be afraid", the angel says to us, because "this is the will of God." And when we make the will of God known in the world, incarnate for all people to see, we join Joseph and Mary and all those across the centuries who chose love over fear.

### A Prayer.

Almighty God, whose angels watch over us night and day: give us strength to conquer our fears, that we may be bold to make known your goodness and love to all the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

*The Rev'd Todd Bruce is a graduate of The University of Georgia, Virginia Theological Seminary, and the Associate Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Day School in Kansas City, Missouri.*

## Saturday, December 19

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25  
Luke 1:5-25

### A Reflection.

The Old Testament lesson and Gospel for today include the amazing stories of parents who had children through miraculous means. Manoah and his wife were barren as well as Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Both couples had lost hope, and yet both were visited by angels who told them that their prayers would be answered and they would conceive. Imagine that kind of joy!

You may not know the sting of not being able to conceive when you really want to or the joy of finding out you're pregnant, but your parents probably do. Angels might not have literally shown up to herald your "advent" (or "coming"), but your birth was no less miraculous. Your nativity probably brought just as much mind-blowing joy as Samson's and John the Baptizer's. Ask your parents to tell you your birth story. Think about how God was revealed in the midst of that story. Every birth is a miracle. Your very life brings joy, hope, and love into the world. Your parents might not have seen the angels there, but they definitely were present!

### A Prayer.

Most holy God, bearer of miraculous tidings, help us to remember the joy, hope, and love we bring into the world by our very being, that, with those blessings, we might share glad tidings to those who have no hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who reigns eternally. Amen.

*The Rev. Jeff Jackson is the rector of St. Nicholas Episcopal Church in rural Harris County, Georgia, and has done youth ministry for 15 years. He has experienced at least 3 miracles in the form of his three children, Tai, Bronwyn, and Liam.*

## Wednesday, December 2

Isaiah 25:6-9

### A Reflection.

It's easy to read the Bible and wonder, "What does this have to do with me?" "Who wants to eat marrow?" "What's with this well-matured wines strained clear?" "Sure, my life's tough, but a shepherd and the idea of lying down in green fields isn't the most comforting thing I can think of!" Then I get to the line of Isaiah that says that, "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces" and I get it. Suddenly I feel a connection with the people who wrote this passage. There have been plenty of times where I've longed for God's comfort, where I've asked where God was, where I've wished God would wipe away my own tears or those of someone I love.

I can understand why the writer would long for this, and this leads me deeper into the whole reading. It's a reading about the future--about promises and hope. About the end when everything will be perfect. We just have to substitute our own images in for their feast in order to really get it: In this land God will make a party for ALL people! A party with more than enough food that will never run out. Expensive and delicious foods. And God will destroy all that separates us from one another, the darkness that hangs over us. And will take away pain and suffering and death and wipe our tears away so that only smiles remain. And it will truly be a party. We will be celebrating with our God.

Imagine the biggest and best party you possibly can. As we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus, God incarnate, this passage is trying to get us excited, to let us know what a big and wonderful thing it is that God came to us in the form of a baby. It's trying to help us catch a glimpse of the grandeur of our life with God, a life that will be so much more amazing and wonderful than even the biggest party we could ever possibly imagine, a life made possible by Jesus.

### A Prayer.

Lord God, as we prepare our hearts and lives for the birth of your son, help us to imagine such a party in which all people could come together and celebrate and rejoice and party without end. Help us to meditate on the true joy this would be and understand that this joy was made flesh is Jesus Christ your son. In his name we pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Christy Laborda graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary in May of 2007 (at 26 years of age). She worked for two years in Durham, North Carolina in charge of a Latino Mission. She is now in Monterey, California in charge of another Latino Mission, San Pablo Apostól. She loves singing, preaching and leading services in Spanish and greatly enjoys all the big parties that come with Latino culture!*

Tuesday, December 1

Isaiah 11:1-10

### A Reflection.

Our reading today from Isaiah envisions what life will be like when the Messiah comes. We will see a world with radical equity and justice and peace, a world like we have never seen before. “The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” It’s a world where everything has been turned upside down and evened out. Even the natural world has been utterly transformed – the lion has become a vegetarian!

As Christians, we understand Jesus to be the Messiah. He has already started ushering this new world into being, but we are not quite there. Although the vision has not been fully realized, we can see signs of this vision, glimpses of it in the world around us anytime an action of justice and peace takes place. We have been invited into helping make this world a reality. This is the world we hope for whenever we pray “your kingdom come, your will be done.” This is the world we hope for in our baptismal promise when we commit to “strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.” Christ invites you to help him. You may be involved in helping usher this new kingdom into place by a big action, such as getting laws changed to make a huge difference for a lot of people. Or you may be involved in a small way, helping bring justice to one person by offering her or him a meal or clothing or even just a smile. Whether big or small, your actions can help create Isaiah’s vision where “the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”

### A Prayer.

“Gracious God, who loves us more than we can ask for or imagine: Awaken our eyes and open our ears to see the glimpses of Isaiah’s messianic vision of equity, justice, and peace that are already being manifested; give us patience as we wait for this vision to be fully realized; and guide, encourage, and challenge us to help usher in this vision as quickly as possible; in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

*Bingham Powell+ is the Curate for Children, Youth, and Family Ministries in Eugene, Oregon.*

Monday, December 21

Luke 1:39-45

### A Reflection.

On November 1st I headed to the local Target for a few things. As I walked in I was expecting to see what I always see when I get to Target: red shopping carts, busy checkout lanes and the One Spot. Instead, I was overcome by gigantic snowflakes and oversized Christmas ornaments in varying shades of red and gold. It looked like Christmas had attacked Target overnight. Everywhere I looked I saw Christmas decorations. Around each corner were signs advertising great “holiday deals.” I could hear “Jingle Bells” and “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” throughout the entire store. I had to stop and check my cell phone to make sure it really was November 1st and not December 24th. Now, don’t get me wrong, I love Christmas, and I’m a fan of getting excited about the holiday season, but the problem with this kind of gearing up for Christmas is that it’s not about Christmas at all. The decorations and sounds in Target weren’t about Jesus; they were about holiday deals and gifts. The joyful expectation of Jesus’s birth wasn’t a part of the scene at all.

In the Gospel lesson for today, just after Mary has found out she will give birth to God’s Son, she goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth (who is also about to have a baby, who will one day be known as John the Baptist). When Elizabeth hears Mary’s voice, her baby leaps for joy, anticipating the wonder of the child Mary will soon have. Elizabeth, also filled with joy, proclaims that Mary and her baby are blessed. Elizabeth and her unborn child know that the world will see the glory of God through Mary’s child. They wait with happiness for the day when he will be born. They’re not focused on presents or Christmas cookies or holiday sales but instead on what’s really important: the birth of the Son of God. Elizabeth and her child set a wonderful example for us. The world is telling us to focus on the material aspects of the holiday season. Elizabeth and her baby remind us of our call to focus on Jesus. His birth is an amazing event, and it’s one worth celebrating with all of our hearts and minds!

### A Prayer.

Heavenly Father, we live in a world which often forgets what Christmas is all about. As we are surrounded by a sea of red and green and holiday sale signs, please help us to focus on Jesus. Help us to be like Elizabeth and her baby, full of joy as we await the birth of your Son, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

*The Rev’d Loren Hague serves as Associate Rector and Director of Youth Ministries at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Augusta, GA. She also was a performer in the halftime show of Super Bowl XXXIV.*

**Tuesday, December 22**

Luke 1:46-56

### A Reflection.

Have you ever seen one of those embroidered pillows or a cross-stitched wall hangings (probably at your grandmother's house) that says "God never gives us more than we can handle"? I've never been sure if I agree with that statement as there have been plenty of times in my life where I feel like I'm stretched to my absolute limit. I wonder if the same wasn't true for Mary when she learned she was carrying God's child. Despite her beautiful response, I have to think she might have felt like she'd been given just a little more than she could handle. And yet, she accepts, even embraces, – scared as she may have been – the responsibility she had been given. Mary knows that while she cannot bear this responsibility alone, she can do it with God's help. Her eloquent words remind us that we are not alone when we feel stretched to our limits, and with God's help we can do things we otherwise thought we couldn't do.

The reality is that life happens, and sometimes it happens on overload. But in those moments- when we are stretched and exhausted and overwhelmed- we are never alone. Challenging times in our lives don't trap or limit us but instead provide us with holy opportunities to be vulnerable, and to turn to God like the children that we are asking for love and comfort and help. When we get to our breaking points we should pay attention, because God is surely present, and that's – as we know from Mary – when miracles happen.

### A Prayer.

Loving and compassionate God, we recognize that to do your will often requires us to let go of our comfortable ways of being to reach out and take a risk with you. Help us to be open like your servant Mary to the powerful ways that you move and act in and around us. Be patient with us as we stumble along trying to discern your will, and rejoice with us when we embrace it. For in embracing your will, we know we open ourselves to the endless possibilities that come with your abounding grace and love. All this we ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The Reverend Meaghan Kelly is the Associate Rector at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Southern Pines, North Carolina, where she lives with her husband Jonathan. She is in her third year of priesthood and enjoys all the aspects of her job at Emmanuel, especially her work with the youth group and her role as chaplain to the Episcopal Day School, an elementary school that shares the church property.*

**Monday, November 30**

Isaiah 2:1-5

### A Reflection.

When the book of Isaiah was written, the city of Jerusalem was an awful, ungodly place. The people there were incredibly arrogant and felt that they could provide everything they needed in life themselves. They had no need for God, and this attitude was not okay with the prophet Isaiah. But Isaiah knew that God had great things planned for Jerusalem, so he couldn't just give up on this city. Isaiah writes this poem as a vision that looks beyond the present disappointment and sees all of the great things that God will one day do with the city of Jerusalem and its people.

I love this reading because Isaiah paints the perfect picture of a peaceful nation. He describes a place where instruments of death are turned into tools for life. In this new Jerusalem, people will turn to God for help in resolving problems rather than taking matters into their own hands. There will be no need for war anymore. Isaiah lays out a promise here, a promise of what will one day be but is not yet. That is what the season of Advent is all about.

### A Prayer.

Almighty God, maker of all things, we thank you for having faith in us and not giving up on us when we disappoint you. During this Advent season of preparation and anticipation of the coming of Christ, equip us with tools for life so that we will be prepared to live as the Christians you called us to be. Amen.

*The Rev. Allison Sandlin Liles serves as the Assistant Rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Auburn, Alabama, and is a member of Episcopal Peace Fellowship's National Executive Council. Allison and her husband Eric are proud parents of a baby boy named Hill and a little brown dog named Scout.*

**Wednesday, December 23**

Luke 1:57-66

### A Reflection.

When Elizabeth gave birth to her son, it was cause for great celebration: great celebration because she and Zechariah were both very old and great celebration for the expectations of this unexpected child. Because of the age of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the Lord must have had special plans for this child who was born to this faithful family. Scripture tells us that all the people of Judea were eager to see who this child would grow up to be, and we all know that this child grew up to become John the Baptizer. He became the prophet who helped to prepare the way for Jesus's arrival when the time came for Jesus's ministry to begin.

Just as John was special to his family and his community and just as God had big plans for John, you are special to your family and your community, and God certainly has big plans for you. As a child of God you will be cared for and watched over by God, and if you allow God to, He will be able to use you the way he used John the Baptist. You may be used to fight injustice, to work for peace, or to help cure people's sicknesses. Somehow God will use you like God used John the Baptist, and there will be much rejoicing.

### A Prayer.

Holy God, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the arrival of your Son Jesus Christ. Be with me as I go on my journey, and help me to always be aware of the needs you have for me. Help me to hear your call to me, and use me for the coming of your kingdom, through you, your Son, and the Holy Spirit I pray. Amen.

*The Rev'd Ben Rockwell is Curate at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. He has a wife, two kids, and a dog. Every now and then he likes to spend a few minutes watching episodes of Robot Chicken.*

## Thursday, December 24

Luke 1:67-79

A Reflection.

Have you ever had something happen in your life that was so good, so cool, that you just wanted to sing out with joy about the goodness in your life? Ever felt the need to call up all your friends and say “You’ll never believe how awesome this is that just happened to me”?

That’s how it was for Zechariah. Zechariah hadn’t said anything in months – his mouth had been shut up because he didn’t have faith in the promises of God. And yet, as soon as he sees his son, John the Baptizer, his mouth is opened wide with this song: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!”. He knows that his son will pave the way for the Messiah, for Jesus Christ. That’s what we have been preparing for this Advent, for the birth of Christ, a reminder that God has not nor ever will abandon us. The tender mercy of God seeks us out, shining God’s love on us no matter who we are or what we do. God became a human being, took on flesh and blood, so that He could understand us and bring us closer to him. That’s something worth sharing, worth telling our families and friends about, worth embracing. God gives the gift of Himself to us because we’re worth it.

A Prayer.

O God, you opened the mouth of Zechariah to proclaim your greatness: Help us to receive the gift of your grace made evident through the birth of your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ and allow Him to guide our feet into the way of peace; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*The Rev’d Joe Greene is the curate at St. Columba’s Episcopal Church in Suwanee, Georgia. He is a graduate of the University of Georgia and the General Theological Seminary. His advent has been spent preparing for the birth of Jesus, as well as preparing for the birth of his first child with his wife, Ashley. When not busy serving God in the church, he’s usually yelling “Go Dawgs!” during football games.*

Dear Reader,

I hope this EYC devotional finds you well as you begin this Advent season and the journey to the manger for Christ’s birth. This devotional will hopefully add to your Advent journey and can serve as a reminder of the meaning of this Advent season.

Each entry has been lovingly crafted for you by a classmate or friend of mine from seminary or college, and they are all clergy from different places in the United States. Each passage included at least one reading from Scripture, a short reflection, a prayer, and then a biographical statement from the author. I encourage you to look at the Scripture citation before reading each reflection because I feel that it can really help to enhance the message of the text. Also, each prayer has been written specifically for the day on which it is appointed. The prayers serve as a way to exit out of the devotional, and I hope you’ll take the time to pray them and keep them with you throughout the day.

Finally, you’ll notice that there are no readings included for Sundays. This is primarily because the reflection that would be included might end up being a lot like what you’d hear in church on a Sunday morning. With that in mind, you will only have here devotions for the days of Monday through Saturday. Starting with November 30, these readings will take you all the way to Christmas Eve.

I hope these readings serve you well in the coming weeks as you prepare for Christmas, and thank you for letting me share them with you. I have enjoyed reading all of them, and I hope they will mean as much to you as they have to me.

Grace and peace,

Fr. Ben



*Saint Paul's  
Episcopal Youth*



*Advent Devotional*