



2024 Advent Reflection Series

Advent is a liturgical season the Christian Churches offer us to spiritually prepare for the celebration of Christmas, the reality of Jesus becoming human so that we can become divine. Advent invites us to open our whole selves to welcome Jesus, God-made-flesh, Emmanuel.

Sunday, December 22 – Michah 5:1-4m Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

In the fourth Sunday Advent gospel of Luke, we encounter Mary and Elizabeth, two very holy, pregnant women, doing the will of God. Mary, pregnant with Jesus, decides to visit Elizabeth. Why she does this is not certain. Elizabeth herself questions why the mother of her Lord should come to her. Elizabeth recognizes that Mary is with child and blessed is the fruit of her womb.

Elizabeth is a wisdom figure not because of her age, but her perception of life. She felt the infant in her womb leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's greeting. Elizabeth recognizes the presence of God in the visit of her cousin.

Mary went with haste to visit her cousin. The fact that Mary went in haste indicates that she felt the visit was necessary for both physical and spiritual support. Mary could have turned to her mother, Ann, for support. She was aware of what their two sons, Jesus and John the Baptist, were going to do for the good of the world.

With three days remaining until Christmas, we may be feeling the stress of the season. Unfortunately, we fail to recognize God's presence when we are on overload. During this time, we need to call upon Mary and Elizabeth that we can lovingly respond to God's nearness in our lives and enter into the joy of the season. Merry Christmas. **Sister Mildred Gross ASC**

Monday, December 23 Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66

Today's reading stresses the importance of preparation before the coming of Christ. Malachi states, "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."

In today's Gospel, Luke tells the story of John the Baptist, his birth and presentation in the temple. Elizabeth and Zechariah rejoice over his birth and the community contemplates what this child will become for they recognize that the hand of the Lord is with him. John, throughout the Bible, is recognized an important figure preparing the way for Christ.

Advent calls us to consider how we have prepared our hearts. Are we open to welcoming Jesus into our lives? Have we made space for Him in the midst of our busy schedules?

Jenifer Stone '87, '93, Board of Trustees

**Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24 - 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16;
Luke 1: 67-79**

Who can limit God to a house or contain God to a geographic site? Clearly God reminds King David and us that all of the cosmos and creation is his dwelling. But a human body also becomes God's dwelling among us in Jesus!

We who sit in darkness and the shadow of death are moved to join Zechariah in his magnificent hymn of praise and adoration because "... the tender mercy of our God" has dawned upon us, giving light to guide our feet into the way of peace. May we be people of peace throughout this Christmas season and the New Year. **Anonymous Alumna**



Christmas, Wednesday, December 25

Christianity is a strange religion, and at the heart of its peculiarity is what we celebrate today, the Christmas story. At the heart of the Christian proclamation is that God became one of us in all things but sin. The strangeness of the Christian story goes even beyond that because Christians don't claim that the coming of Christ was merely an event of the past, but rather that he continues to be with us today! The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is the definitive sign that God is not an abstract idea or a distant entity, but rather that he is the Emmanuel, the God who is with us, the God who entered the mess of human life and salvation history to "ransom captive Israel" as the old Advent hymn goes!

That same Christ who entered our tumultuous reality by being placed in a manger, a place where animals eat, continues to give himself to us as food in the Holy Eucharist, present at every mass. It is the continual presence of Christ, which we celebrate today, that gives all of reality a new direction and horizon. My friends, the true gift of Christmas is not merely the celebration of His birth, but the invitation to recognize His presence in the communion of believers that we call the Church today. Emmanuel is here, now, and always. Merry Christmas!

Father Ed Herzog '10, '11 Newman Chaplain