2020 Advent Reflections
from the Villanova Community
A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.—Jn 1:6–7

This year, Villanova finished installing the last in a series of stained-glass windows in Corr Chapel. The women and men depicted represent a range of ethnicities, backgrounds and abilities. They lived as vessels of light. Through them, Christ illuminated their worlds.

Light is a powerful symbol of Advent, especially in 2020, which feels like an endless night of pandemic, injustice and division. Yet this season reminds us that despair does not triumph. Our hope is in Jesus, who came “to shine on those who dwell in darkness” (Lk 1:79) and give them peace.

As we prepare for Christmas, may we “testify to the light” by promoting the common good, building peace and explaining the reason for our hope (see 1 Pt 3:15).

Your Friends in Mission and Ministry
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

O LORD, ... we are all the work of your hands. (Is 64:7)
As we begin this Advent journey, let’s rely on what Augustine and Augustinians say regarding the common good:

• You should live in unity of spirit with one mind and heart centered upon God.

• All your work should be shared together, with greater care and more ready eagerness than if you were doing things for yourself alone, putting the common good before your own.

• The more you are concerned about the common good rather than your own, the more progress you will know that you have made.

• Our great and profitable common inheritance is God.

• The inequalities that this world suffers constitute a clear need for working toward the common good. Our life should be a sign of protest against the mentality of the consumer society in which we live.

In celebration of God’s sharing our life, let’s share God’s life with one another—one mind, one heart, one race, one family.

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, Assistant Vice President, Mission and Ministry
They left their boat and their father and followed him. (Mt 4:22)
In today’s Gospel, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their lives as fishermen and join him. I try to imagine myself in the disciples’ shoes, being called to leave behind everything I have ever known and follow a stranger into the unknown. And yet as I reflect on what it might be like, I realize I already know. I, too, have been asked to leave my nets. We all have. Every day, Christ asks us to leave behind the things that preoccupy us and distract us from following Him.

What are the nets in your life? What keeps you from leaving them behind to follow Jesus? The tricky thing about nets is that they disguise themselves as essential. It would have been easy for Peter, Andrew, James and John to say no to Jesus. Fishing wasn’t just a hobby, something they did on the weekends for fun. It was their livelihood. But God had plans that were much greater. Is there something you are busying yourself with that is keeping you from God’s greater plan?

As we begin Advent, let’s identify our nets—and then leave them behind and follow Him.

—Cecilia Spesia ’21 CLAS
A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse.
(Is 11:1)
The slogan “no justice, no peace” has been on the lips and signs of people across America as they protest racial injustice. Some perceive the slogan as a threat, but Isaiah’s beautiful prophetic poem teaches us that peace is the natural consequence of justice: There can’t be true peace without justice. Isaiah calls us to envision a society free of prejudice, where truth guides decisions, and the poor and afflicted are given preferential concern. The peace that results from these right relationships is not simply the absence of war. It is a deep, profound peace wherein ancient conflicts are resolved and all can live in harmony.

We are blessed because, through what we have seen and heard, we know that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is the shoot from the stump of Jesse about whom Isaiah wrote. Jesus’ teachings to love one another as we love ourselves—and as He loves us—are the foundation of right relationships. In this season of joyful hope, let us build the common good by acting on the words of Pope Paul VI: “If you want peace, work for justice.”

—John Bangert ’76 CLAS
They all ate and were satisfied.

(Mt 15:37)
More and more, society seems to cry out for salvation. Who will save us from the perils of our time? What must we do to move beyond this fate? These are my theological ponderings as I seek meaning in the mysteries of life in 2020.

As we begin this new season, we wait on the Lord to ready our hearts. The words “a clean heart create for me” and “renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:12) bring healing and comfort, and call us to be light to our brothers and sisters, especially those who struggle. We have seen, heard and endured so much over the last months. In this time of pandemic, may we seek to experience a fuller vision of faith, one that includes diversity and inclusion. May our hearts deepen in empathy, compassion and service for a suffering world in need of prayerful embrace and righteousness.

We search for the Savior in the most despairing circumstances. The day is coming when “God will wipe away the tears” (Is 25:8) of those who suffer as they seek justice and mercy. May we rejoice in righteousness. God be our light of goodness for a better world!

—Sherine O. Green, Part-Time Faculty, Theology and Religious Studies

**READING**
IS 25:6–10A

**PSALM**
PS 23:1–6

**GOSPEL**
MT 15:29–37
A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace.
(Is 26:3)
In the First Reading and the Gospel, we have the image of a city and a house, respectively, built on a solid foundation. Jesus tells us that if we are to survive the buffeting and tempests of life, we must listen to His words and do “the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21). What is the will of the Father?

If we look at Jesus’ own life, he gives us the model of one who completely follows the will of God. By reading the Gospels, we can study how Jesus lived—the way he thought and acted. Knowing how He lived will help us come to know the will of the Father.

Jesus gives us a clue: The will of the Father has no duplicity in it. For if someone truly believes Jesus, they will not be content with reciting words, but will be filled with the fire of the Spirit and will commit to living a life of love and performing works of charity. We then can become part of the “strong city” that Jesus sets up for us, “a nation of firm purpose” that keeps its trust in Him (Is 26:1–3).

—Alejandro Gomez ’20 CLAS

**READING**

IS 26:1–6

**PSALM**

PS 118:1, 8–9, 19–21, 25–27A

**GOSPEL**

MT 7:21, 24–27
I shall see the bounty of the LORD in the land of the living. (Ps 27:13)
While we were walking down Chestnut Street, my son asked, “Why is that man tapping a cane?” I explained that he could not see out of his eyes. “So he can now see out of a cane?” he asked. I replied, “When you are blind, different tools help you navigate the world—like a cane or a Seeing Eye dog.” He thought about this and said, “If I go blind, I will take the seeing cane.” Today’s readings reminded me of that conversation. Which tools help us see more clearly?

Jesus opened the eyes of the blind men and healed them. If Jesus had said to them, “I’ve opened your hearts,” they might have laughed at him. We think of healing as physical, but spiritual healing accompanies it. A transformed spirit cannot always be seen by others and isn’t even apparent to ourselves sometimes.

Jesus calls us to be transformed—to take up our “seeing cane” and follow Him. Where in your life are you blind? Our transformation happens thought by thought, choice by choice. It’s not easy or popular, yet we have no time to waste. Shed your blindness, and “spread word” of Jesus (Mt 9:31).

—Sue Schultes ’87 VSB

**READING**
IS 29:17–24

**PSALM**
PS 27:1, 4, 13–14

**GOSPEL**
MT 9:27–31
Send out laborers for his harvest.

(Mt 9:38)
There’s an old joke about a man trapped in a flood who refuses aid from a fire truck, a boat and a helicopter because “God will save me.” When the floodwater eventually wins out and the man, in the afterlife, asks why God didn’t save him, God responds that He sent all of the rescue vehicles! Today’s readings remind me of that story, but they change my interpretation of it. Sometimes we are the ones crying out for help, but sometimes we are the rescue vehicles.

Jesus, in no uncertain terms, sends His followers to serve one another and give without cost. When His heart is moved by the crowd because they are “troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36), he does something about it. When, like Jesus, our hearts are similarly moved to action, we become active participants in God’s plan. There are a lot of people in our community and in our world crying out, thirsting and waiting for something. What can I do to help? What does God ask me to do?

—Thomas P. Umile, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Chemistry
Be eager to be found without spot or blemish. (2 Pt 3:14)
In his first vocal movement of *Messiah*, Handel uses the words of the prophet Isaiah as a soothing meditation on Scripture. It is an auditory moment of comfort associated with Christmas, a time when we retreat from the bustle of the everyday into the glow of cherished tradition. We wrap ourselves in warm layers, eat our favorite foods, bask in the warm light of our decorations and sit in hushed anticipation of midnight worship.

While it is easy to lose ourselves in the halcyon days of Christmas, Advent is a season of preparation. If we are meant to prepare for Christ’s appearance, we should look to His example. Just as Christ stood with the forgotten, marginalized and oppressed, so should our hands, hearts and minds be instruments of God’s care and comfort for those calling out for justice. We can go into that wilderness and, together, lay straight a path to return home. Christmas is warmth and comfort, yes, but it is also companionship in discomfort.

To be God’s message of comfort to the world—what better Advent preparation can there be?

—Elizabeth Remelius, Program Coordinator, College of Professional Studies

**READING**
IS 40:1–5, 9–11
2 PT 3:8–14

**PSALM**
PS 85:9–14

**GOSPEL**
MK 1:1–8
Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! (Is 35:4)

Memorial of St. Ambrose, Bishop
Given the experiences of 2020, our collective hope offers a perfect canvas illustrating the relationship between Isaiah’s vision and the reality of anticipating its fulfillment. “Be strong, fear not! Here is your God” (Is 35:4).

In his encyclical Fratelli tutti, Pope Francis opines that the pandemic has led the world to work together toward a common goal. This global action sheds light on the selflessness of many, the beauty of humanity and the imperative to promote values for the good of all.

The men who bring their sick friend to Jesus are determined to see his condition improve. Their action shows that our sense of “communion can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion and act instead as neighbors, lifting and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good” (FT 67).

May we hasten fearlessly along the path of service, openness and generosity and thus be prepared for the delights of God’s kingdom, where “kindness and truth shall meet” (Ps 85:11).

—The Rev. Deji Dada ’20 MS

**READING**

IS 35:1–10

**PSALM**

PS 85:9AB,10–14

**GOSPEL**

LK 5:17–26
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. (Lk 1:31)
As a young person whose education from primary to college was in Catholic schools, I always looked forward to December 8—just not for the holiest of reasons. It was that extra day off that made it special. But as I’ve grown wiser and have taken on the responsibilities that come with being a mother of three children (who also attend Catholic school), my devotion to Mary has deepened.

Today’s Gospel fills me with awe and gratitude for Mary’s marvelous deed. As we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, let us embrace the chance to pause and thank Mary for saying yes when asked if she would be the Mother of God and, in doing so, become the mother of all humankind.

Let us reflect, would I be willing to give so much of myself to God if asked? How is it possible to be like Mary and fear not?

As this bleak year draws to a close, perhaps we can choose to be like Mary and say yes to caring for God’s creation. Perhaps we can bring light into the darkness by taking a moment on this blessed day to reach out to someone in need with an open heart and a giving spirit.

—Megan Walsh-Boyle, Staff Writer, University Communication and Marketing

**READING**
GN 3:9–15, 20
EPH 1:3–6, 11–12

**PSALM**
PS 98:1–4

**GOSPEL**
LK 1:26–38
You will find rest for yourselves.  
(Mt 11:29)
In today’s First Reading, Isaiah says that God calls us each “by name” (Isa 40:26). If we answer that call, we “will soar as with eagles’ wings” (v. 31). God has a specific, marvelous call for each of us. If we follow Christ, we will achieve greatness.

But this incredible mission begs the question of how to answer Christ’s call, and to answer that question, we can turn to Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Mt 11:29). A yoke is used to help oxen work in pairs; it constrains them and thus enables them to work in unison so that their joint effort is more powerful.

In like form, we are called to wear the “yoke” of the teachings of Christ. It requires discipline and sacrifice. But this yoke will protect us from sin and its resultant loneliness and bitterness; it creates unity with our friends and family; and finally, it frees us to pursue God’s call. It is thus fitting that Jesus would declare, “My yoke is easy, and my burden light” (v. 30).

—Thomas Callahan ’21 MS

**READING**
Isa 40:25–31

**PSALM**
Ps 103:1–4, 8, 10

**GOSPEL**
Mt 11:28–30
I will turn the desert into a marshland.

(Is 41:18)
When I was in eighth grade at my parish school, I had a first-grade buddy. His name was Ryan, and he had the iconic smile of a kid who has recently lost a tooth. The December “buddy” project was to help first graders present their Advent writing. Ryan wrote how he had been busy “making his heart soft like butter” to welcome Jesus. It is a beautiful image that has stayed with me.

Today’s First Reading begins with a promise: “I am the LORD, your God, who grasp your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’” (Is 41:13). The image of “grasping” my hand can bring a tear to my eye if I think on it too long. Who would have thought there would be a time when we couldn’t hug a friend? Or hold a family member’s hand? Yet here we are.

I am trying to focus on Ryan’s image of a soft heart and God’s image of grasping my hand. To be honest, both are difficult in these uncertain times. My takeaway is to remember that both images are grounded in love and promote hope. If there was ever a year when we needed to be grounded in love and the promotion of hope, it’s this one.

—Meghan Petsko ’21 MA, Director, Graduate Tax Program

READING
IS 41:13–20

PSALM
PS 145:1, 9–13B

GOSPEL
MT 11:11–15
The LORD watches over the way of the just.  
(Ps 1:6)
In today’s Gospel, Jesus challenges the crowds about how they view John the Baptist and Himself. He sees that the people are used to judging and discriminating against others (be they Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors or prostitutes). What can we say about the world we live in? Some people see those who are homeless or addicted to drugs as “worthless,” or they want to create barriers for immigrants and asylum seekers.

Just as Christ challenged the crowd to change their perceptions, He challenges us to stop discriminating. He also teaches us how to care for one another: Heal the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless. At a time when wealth disparity has increased and many struggle to make a decent living, we must realize that Jesus came to show us that we are all God’s children. We must work toward the common good, recognizing each other’s dignity and abiding by the great commandment: “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37, 39).

—Boratha Tan ’16 COE

**READING**
IS 48:17–19

**PSALM**
PS 1:1–4, 6

**GOSPEL**
MT 11:16–19
Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (Lk 1:30)
Advent reminds me to be still, to listen and to prepare my heart for the birth of Jesus.

Am I prepared? Am I ready? Would I have answered the same way young Mary did? Would I say: Here I am, Lord; I hear you calling? Mary responded to God with an open heart and mind and a willingness to set aside her fears and trust in God: “May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

She didn’t exactly know what would happen to her or to how her life would be as the mother of Jesus. She knew that she wasn’t in control and trusted in her Lord. She knew that God was sovereign, the Most High, the leader of all people. We often hear ourselves say, “Trust the process,” but instead we should say, “Trust in Jesus and ask Him to take charge of our lives.”

In this uncertain time, these words could not be truer. We are not in control and we need to trust in God to lead us through all times. Let us be led by you, Lord, just as Mary was.

— Lorraine Miller ’86 FCN, MSN, RN, Nurse, Student Health Center
In all circumstances give thanks. 
(1 Thes 5:18)
In today’s readings, we are told that we have been “anointed … to heal the brokenhearted” and “to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Is 61:1) and that we are “clothed … with a robe of salvation” (v. 10). We announce the Lord’s greatness (Lk 1:46), rejoice always and in all circumstances give thanks (1 Thes 5:16, 18).

God’s two greatest messages are to love God above all else and to love others as God loves us. To me, these readings speak directly to the second message. We are blessed, and we have a responsibility to do God’s good work every day for the benefit of the human family and to promote the common good.

I often ask God to help me remember to exhibit forgiveness, sacrifice and love in my daily life as Jesus did. When we do so, we fulfill God’s words to love others as He loves us and become closer to God.

We have the ability to help one another each day through our actions. I pray that the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to see Jesus in everything and everyone around us and, like John the Baptist, “to testify to the light, so that all might believe” (Jn 1:7).

—William M. Mooney III, Esq., ’87 VSB
A star shall advance from Jacob.
(Nm 24:17)
Our readings reveal anxieties about knowledge and truth. In the Gospel, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and elders to tell him by what authority, heavenly or earthly, does John the Baptist baptize. The Pharisees are not interested in discovering the true answer to Jesus’ question. Instead, they are seeking the answer that will garner the most political approval. Depending on how they answer, they will be subject to condemnation by Jesus or the crowds. Their social status is more important to them than truth.

In our own lives, it is nearly impossible to drown out the voices of others when we discern what is good and true. A voice inside our minds says, “If I say or believe this, everyone will think less of me.” But truth, as we hear in the First Reading, does not come from public approval. Truth comes from God. Balaam’s words are true because he “hears what God says, and knows what the Most High knows” and “sees what the Almighty sees” (Nm 24:4). Let us seek the truth, listen to God speaking in our hearts and pray for the grace to see the world through His eyes.

—Shea Szpila ’21 MA
Look to him that you may be radiant with joy.

(Ps 34:6)
The parable of the two sons—one who promises to work in his father’s vineyard but doesn’t, and one who refuses to go but, later, does—resonated with my boys when they were teens. Whenever they faced a clean-their-room deadline—for example, company coming in T-minus two hours—one would jokingly accuse the other of being the son who says, “Sure thing!” but then goes off to play a video game.

Complacency is seductive and dangerous. I find it easy to take what God gives me and asks of me for granted. Yeah, I know my calling is to avail myself of God’s grace to build up the kingdom. I’m on it, I tell myself every day. Ask anyone who knows me—I’m a believer. What’s the problem?

The problem is that my “good” intentions and verbal assents don’t translate into actions. When I say I’ll phone a relative living alone in lockdown, I instead binge-watch Netflix. When I resolve to spend more time in prayer, I start yet another sudoku.

Lord, give me the strength not to simply say yes but to do Your will. The time to live out my faith is always T-minus zero.

—Suzi Wentzel ’14 MA, Director of Research and Planning, Mission and Ministry
I form the light and create the darkness.
(Is 45:7)
In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the Messiah. Jesus, who had been performing many miracles of healing, responds by telling the disciples to “go and tell John what you have seen and heard” (Lk 7:22). Jesus doesn’t just tell them that He is the Messiah. He wants them to come to know the truth for themselves by examining His deeds. This reading reminded me of another passage: “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:16).

Jesus’ actions exemplify the principle of the common good in a most beautiful and perfect way. Jesus served all people, but gave special attention to the suffering, disadvantaged and marginalized. We are called to do the same. When we follow Jesus’ example, not only do we let others know that we are His disciples (they will know us “by our fruits”) but we also come to know Him better because He is reflected in every person we serve. The Advent season reminds us to be charitable to those most in need. Let us carry this concern for the common good with us throughout the new year!

—Teresa G. Wojcik, PhD, Chair and Associate Professor, Education and Counseling

READING
IS 45:6C–8, 18, 21C–25

PSALM
PS 85:9AB, 10–14

GOSPEL
LK 7:18B–23
Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. (Mt 1:16)
As a young priest, I dreaded being the homilist at Mass on the Thursday of the Third Week of Advent, which gives us Jesus’ genealogy. The Gospel is probably one of the most tedious of the liturgical year. It is not interesting reading or listening, and many of the names are unfamiliar and difficult to pronounce. Still, it is a significant Gospel for us upon which to reflect as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Before the birth of Jesus, God had a long relationship with God’s people—none of whom were perfect. Jacob was a cheater. David had an affair. Some were scoundrels. Like all human beings, they had their own struggles. All this shows that God’s work can be accomplished despite our sinfulness.

Jesus became like us in all things but sin. He understood our past and came so that our future can be totally with Him, and we will know “the fullness of peace for ever” (see Ps 72:7). To promote the common good, God invites us to share in the work of salvation. May we recommit ourselves, in spite of our frailties, to sharing in Jesus’ life and ministry.

—The Rev. Bill Waters, OSA, ’68 MA

**READING**
GN 49:2, 8–10

**PSALM**
PS 72:1–4B, 7–8, 17

**GOSPEL**
MT 1:1–17
The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. (Mt 1:20)
I try to pay attention to my dreams in case God is sending me messages like God did for Joseph. I envy Joseph that his dreams were so clear; my dreams tend to need some interpretation.

My daydreams, though, are much clearer. When a seemingly random thought occurs to me—someone pops into my mind or I hear a call for volunteers or a story on the news touches my heart—I believe God is sending me a message in the same way God instructed Joseph. God uses those things that catch our attention, that shimmer for us like the sun sparkling on the water, to show us our next steps.

Psalm 72:4 tells us God “shall defend the afflicted among the people” and “save the children of the poor.” We have a part to play in this work, and God often shows us the way by the people and events that touch our hearts.

Let us pay attention to what may seem like random thoughts and inclinations, and then ask God for the courage to act.

—Madeline Bialecki ’82 CLAS
O God, you have taught me from my youth.

(Ps 71:17)
Patience and God’s timing are two themes in today’s Gospel that were important for Zechariah and Elizabeth—and for us now. So many times we pray to God with a list of requests and wonder why they don’t seem to be answered. I am sure that Elizabeth and Zechariah prayed for a child for many years and were probably frustrated with the results. Imagine the joy and surprise when she conceived John—it literally made Zechariah speechless!

There are many situations that frustrate us in today’s world, but by the power and persistence of prayer, we can change things. Our timing is not God’s timing, and that is a hard concept to understand. Let us pray this Advent for the grace to be patient with God and the wisdom to hear His answer in ways that may surprise us. May we remember the words of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah: “Do not be afraid,” for “your prayer has been heard” (Lk 1:13).

—Carla Grimm ’97 VSB

READING
JGS 13:2–7, 24–25A

PSALM
PS 71:3–4A, 5–6B, 16–17

GOSPEL
LK 1:5–25
To him who can strengthen you ... be glory forever and ever. (Rom 16:25–27)
When I imagined what my sophomore year would be like, this wasn’t what I had in mind. I had planned the events I would go to, the classes I would take and how I would spend my time. As the Gospel today tells us, however, the path that we may want to take is nothing compared to what God has in store.

With a virus and wildfires that have taken so many lives, the continuation of racial violence and the polarization that has increased with the election, we all have had to learn to live in a state of anxiety and uncertainty. I can only imagine the fear that Mary felt when an angel appeared to her and told her that she was going to have a son. Yet she said yes. How different would our world be if she had not done so!

Today is the last Sunday in our preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ. As we prepare to welcome the Lord this Christmas and find our way into the new year, let us have the courage to say yes to Him, knowing that He is with us, giving us the grace to take on whatever comes our way, and that we will be better for it. Let us have the faith to accept the will of our God!

—Cathy Nguyen ’23 CLAS
For in him our hearts rejoice.  
(Ps 33:21)
“Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song” (Ps 33:1, 3). A new song, indeed. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth cannot help crying out in jubilation as she recognizes that the one who is carrying the incarnate God within in her, Mary, has arrived at her house.

It is hard to fathom what this would have meant to Mary, to hear with such confident rejoicing: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42). Mary is spared the difficulty of explaining her news and instead is embraced in mutual jubilation—exulting in the Lord, singing a new song—because the most radically world-altering event, at the center of all history, is coming to fruition, with their faith at the very heart of it.

How do we carry Christ with us to others? How do we recognize the hidden Christ in others? How do we respond to God’s radical love when it draws so incomprehensibly near? How do we embrace this vision of a world transformed, allowing it to fill us with unbounded jubilation?

—Gregory Grimes, PhD, ’05 CLAS, Senior Instructor, Theology and Religious Studies
He remembered his promise of mercy.

(Lk 1:54)
Hannah has her priorities right. She takes Samuel to the temple to consecrate him to God’s service. Later in 1 Samuel appears the Song of Hannah, which has some similarities to the Magnificat of Mary in Luke’s Gospel. Both express joy in praising God.

As a young adult, I joined a Pilgrimage of Trust in Pittsburgh and learned a song about how “the praises go up and the blessings come down.” It’s a simple but trusty remedy. All of the world will benefit when God is praised and His name not taken in vain. Have we given time to talk to God one-on-one this Advent? Have we been open to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? His mother rejoices in God’s mercy.

There’s still time to get our hearts ready for the Christmas season. Let’s think twice about our priorities at this time of year. Can you fathom how deep is the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for you? If not, say a prayer to St. Frances Cabrini today, the anniversary of her entry into eternal life. We can count on the hope that Christmas brings. Praise God!

—Nicole B. Baker ’86 CLAS

READING
1 SM 1:24–28

PSALM
1 SM 2:1, 4–8D

GOSPEL
LK 1:46–56
Guide me in your truth and teach me.

(Ps 25:5)
Two days before the birth of Jesus, we listen to the story of the birth and naming of John, his cousin and the final prophet. I put myself with the family and neighbors who celebrate with Elizabeth and Zechariah. We are supportive but questioning. Why is Zechariah mute? How is it that Elizabeth births a child at her age? And then more surprises at the celebration—naming the boy John and Zechariah’s sudden cure. And his first words are praises to God! Luke next says, “Then fear came upon all their neighbors” (Lk 1:65).

I am reminded how often I am Zechariah and seek to question God, to make my life structured and predictable. I see myself as the neighbors with a fear of extraordinary events and answers that are not what I expect or want. Luke reminds us that God’s ways are not our ways. In two days, we will meet Jesus in the most unexpected of places: a manger surrounded by animals and shepherds. It is only through deep silence (Zechariah’s muteness) and contemplation that we can release our fears, rejoice in the present moment and embrace God’s love.

—Brian McCaffrey ’89 VSB
He has come to his people and set them free.
(Lk 1:68)
Our readings for the final liturgy of Advent sing to us of the goodness of God, and of His care and love for David and His people, Israel. Zechariah’s song in our Gospel reveals Zechariah’s love of God, and introduces his son, John, who is called by God to prepare the way. John will baptize people with water in preparation for the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire by the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus did not arrive in a cloud of glory but came as baby, born to a family in a cold stable. God sent the Son to guide us in the way of peace, to help us see and understand our blessings. God walked with us in Jesus and taught us not only how to praise our God, but also how to live like Him, taking care of each other, being the hand that feeds others, turning the other cheek to slights and wrongs.

God gives His grace to us in the forgiveness of our sins, and we are to give the same forgiveness to our fellow humans. We celebrate the birth of Jesus by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

—Lorraine McCorkle, Graphic Designer, University Communication and Marketing
The Nativity of the Lord
The angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid;
for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.
For today in the city of David
a savior has been born for you who is Christ and
Lord.”

(Lk 2:10–11)
Merry Christmas!
MISSION & MINISTRY