“Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!” (Is 40:3)

This great commission of Advent invites all people to be on God’s crew. It urges us to build the kingdom of heaven in our world, in our relationships and in our hearts. But it also can daunt us.

Fortunately, God gives us some pretty amazing tools with which to work: virtues. And thanks to God’s grace, the more we use these tools, the more effective they become.

The weeks (and, thus, the candles) of Advent are often associated with **hope, love, joy** and **peace**. As we begin this holy season, perhaps we can each ask ourselves, “How often do I embody these virtues? How often do they fall to the bottom of my toolbox?”

Through our prayers and practices in the coming days, may we use these tools to better prepare the way for the Christ Child.

Your Friends in Mission and Ministry
Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

(Rom 13:12)
Advent is meant to be a time of preparation, and, boy, is it ever. Unfortunately, sometimes the “preparations” become burdens. Did a batch of cookies burn? I haven’t finished sending my cards. What do you buy the person who has everything? Why aren’t all of the lights twinkling? The house needs to be cleaned before the guests arrive. Where did all this traffic come from? Those gifts aren’t going to wrap themselves.

When Jesus says, “Stay awake!” (Mt 24:42), I think he’s giving us advice for getting through those busy, stressful, frantic parts of the holidays. When we get distracted, Jesus grabs us by the shoulders and tells us to pay attention to what’s important. We’re supposed to go into Christmas rejoicing, after all, not angrily crossing items off to-do lists.

Some of the busyness of the holiday season is good. Catching up with friends and relatives, celebrating family traditions, spending a quiet moment with someone, and performing acts of charity and kindness all make this time of year special. When things get hectic, though, can I find God coming into the world amongst the chores and the crowded mall? Can I minimize errands that are empty gestures and instead focus on what brings the joys of the season?

Regardless of how I fill the days of Advent, Christmas will come, “like a thief in the night” (see Mt 24:43). I best be ready. Thankfully, though, God finds us, if we’re ready or not.

—Thomas Umile, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Chemistry
Many will come ... [to] the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 8:11)
The First Reading ends with an important reminder that the Lord provides “shelter and protection” (Is 4:6). This semester has not been easy for me and a lot of people I care about. I’ve been hesitant to open my heart to God and allow Him to work through me. I often feel like the soldier in today’s Gospel, whose words we say at every Mass, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed” (Mt 8:8). My prayer life has not been where I’d like it to be, which has caused me to distance myself even more from God. I haven’t felt worthy enough to even ask Him for His help.

It seems contradictory, though, to avoid the One who is Love, who made us and cares for us. I’m still trying to regain my trust in Him. When life throws curveballs, it’s hard to believe that everything will be okay. I know running to the Lord won’t necessarily solve all my problems. Praying isn’t going to make them all magically disappear. But I know that Jesus doesn’t want me to walk on this path alone. My strength can come only from Him who created me. If I don’t turn to the Lord, I’m going to feel even more overwhelmed by life. Trusting Him is easier said than done, but it’s so worth it in the end.

—Angelica Tiffany Garcia ’22 COE
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.
(Is 11:2)
“Justice shall flourish in his time, and the fullness of peace forever” (see Ps 72).

Today’s reading and psalm are rich in imagery: the growth of new shoots and buds; animals often seen as predators being a “guest” of their prey; children comfortable playing with snakes. As I sit with these symbols of relationship, in which there is an absence of fear or exclusion, Pope Paul VI’s Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace (1972) comes to mind. He writes, “If you want Peace, work for Justice”—a phrase that Catholic social teaching (CST) draws from to promote human flourishing. CST invites us to recognize and affirm that all people are made in the image of a God who is Love and that human beings are interdependent with all of creation. Human dignity is affirmed when a community ensures that each person’s needs are met and when they can live in harmony with others who, together, pursue the common good.

Call to mind an area in your life where there is a desire for justice to flourish. Is there a word or phrase from the readings to return to throughout the day? What might “fullness of peace” look like? Is there a response or action which might be a step along the way of peace for you today?

—Michelle Sherman ’12 MA, Campus Minister for Retreats
In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

(Ps 23:2)
Today our readings encompass the idea of abundance. In the First Reading, God is said to “destroy the veil that veils all peoples” (Is 25:7). The distractions in our lives—work, academics or extracurricular responsibilities—can all cast a veil over us and cause us to forget why we are really alive: the selfless love of our Father and the unity we hold with all of humanity, thanks to Him. The only way to lift this veil is to devote time to following in Jesus’ footsteps—in service, in kindness, and in meditation and prayer.

Many of us are familiar with the miracle in today’s Gospel story, in which Jesus feeds a crowd of thousands with only seven loaves of bread and a few fish. “They all ate and were satisfied” (Mt 15:37). Similarly, Jesus fills our lives with abundance—whether or not we can see it at first. The people and love present on this campus, the love from our friends and family even when they are far away, and the privilege to be a Villanovan tasked with igniting change are only a few examples. Thank you, God, for filling my life with abundance.

—Lindsay Gallagher ’22 VSB
Be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

(Mt 7:24)
In reading today’s Gospel about the house built on rock and the house built on sand, two things stood out to me. First, the Gospel begins with Jesus reminding us that “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 7:21). I always find it a bit jarring when Jesus reminds us that not everyone will get in, so to speak. It begs the question of who will and what do I need to do.

And that is the second thing that struck me in the Gospel. Jesus shows us what we need to do to enter the kingdom. We must act on His words. We are called to help free people from whatever may be imprisoning them. We are called to help those who are blinded by ambition, fear, jealousy or anything else to see more clearly. In our everyday relationships, we are called to heal, to serve, to forgive, to love. Such is the one “who listens to these words of mine and acts on them” (Mt 7:24).

At the end of this Advent season, we will celebrate the incredible love of a Savior who makes eternal life possible for all who will accept the gift. Today, let us ask Jesus to show us where we may be only listening to His words … and then let us ask for the grace to act on them as well.

—Matt Manion, Faculty Director for Church Management, VSB
The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD.
(Is 29:19)
When I was growing up, this day was a favorite in my house. The feast of St. Nicholas meant candy and fun and little treats in our shoes, which we put out the night before. As a child, I thought the bigger the pair of shoes, the more candy they could hold, so I would always put out snow boots.

Today, I continue this tradition with my daughters. They are just as excited as I was, and for them, the feast of St. Nicholas means that Christmas is right around the corner. And just like their mother, they, too, try to find the biggest pair of shoes in the hopes that it will lead to more goodies.

The innocence and faith we had as children is something we should endeavor to get back as adults. In our increasingly busy lives, consumed by work, technology and family obligations, many of us have lost that sense of wonder and belief.

Today’s readings remind us that, through the Lord, all things are possible if we believe. Like the two blind men whose faith allowed them to see, we too are given the gift of God’s mercy and salvation. Let us therefore strive to once again be like little children and open our hearts and minds this Advent as we prepare ourselves to celebrate and welcome God’s greatest gift to the world—our Savior, Jesus Christ.

—Marie Witman, Associate Director, Program Operations, VSB
Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.

(Mt 10:8)
Advent is a season of hope. Our hope as Christians is anchored in faith—faith especially in God’s providence, faith that God will heal our wounds and put into order what is amiss in our lives. “He will be gracious to you when you cry out,” the prophet says. “As soon as he hears he will answer you” (Is 30:19).

We can be assured that God has a plan and that we are a part of the plan. His plan to feed the hungry includes his message to us to be sensitive to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. God had a plan for the redemption of St. Augustine through the homily of St. Ambrose (whose feast the Church celebrates today), which led to the former’s conversion. God has a plan for the millions whose search for meaning is assisted by the spirituality of Augustine.

This season, while we keep alive our expectations and aspirations, may we be the fulfillment of the aspirations of those around us. God will always do His part. We pray to be ready as laborers to do our part, for “the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few” (Mt 9:47).

—The Rev. Deji Dada, graduate student, Church Management
Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you.

(Rom 15:7)
Isaiah shares with us the hope of Jesus restoring what is broken, what is wrong and unjust. One day, when we see the new heaven and new earth (see Is 65:17), we will be made whole again. God promises us a radical new kingdom. We see a picture in which the wolf and the lamb pasture together, and the child plays next to the cobra. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the LORD” (Is 11:9), and this knowledge will make profound and pervasive changes—perfect peace, restoration, justice. Hallelujah!

Though this most glorious time has not yet arrived, I wish to humbly offer some thoughts on what justice can mean for us now.

*Justice* is mentioned many times in the Bible to describe taking care of widows and orphans, the poor and the stranger. Today, *rectifying justice* can be seen in initiatives to bring help to disadvantaged youth, change immigration laws and prosecute loan companies who prey on the poor. *Primary justice* calls us to look at our neighborhoods and see if we can take time to personally meet the needs of the elderly, hungry or marginalized. God is concerned about the defenseless ones. As we wait for the day when “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain” (Rv 21:4), can we pray to have His heart for the vulnerable now?

—Anna Kiker, MBA, Research Accounting Office
God ... has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

(Eph 1:3)
Today’s Gospel shares a story that is central to our Christian faith: a child will be born and “will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). The Incarnation will be the work of the Holy Spirit in a young woman named Mary.

Many years ago, I lived with a religious community that awoke each day to a knock on the door and the sound of the words, “Ecce ancilla domini” (“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord”). The response each of us gave was, “Fiat mihi suæcum Verbum tuum” (“May it be done to me according to Thy word”)—the same response that Mary gave two thousand years ago. This “virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph” (Lk 1:27) was summoned, and although her life would change dramatically if she said “yes,” so would the world. Mary trusted the word of the Angel Gabriel, who told her, “Do not be afraid” (Lk 1:30). God was with her.

We are all inheritors of that promise to trust in God and fear not. I wonder if our morning and evening prayers of trusting in God’s presence in our lives this day might free us from fear. Can we say “yes,” believing that what is done to us is according to God’s word?

—Barbara Wall, PhD, Vice President, Mission and Ministry
The glory of the LORD shall be revealed.

(Is 40:5)
Today’s Gospel is so fitting for our lives, which seem to be endlessly busy. In the reading from Matthew, Jesus asks his disciples, “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine … and go in search of the stray?” (18:12). This is the same way that God will seek, find and protect those of us who have wandered from His love.

Despite my best attempts at focusing on others, making time for prayer and many other priorities of a life in faith, I consistently stray—getting caught up in my ego and selfish thoughts and actions, among other things, and forgetting that prayer is my connection to Christ and that I am called to bring others into relationship with Him.

I am sure we all go through these ebbs and flows of our lives of faith. Despite these failures and our determination to depend on ourselves, Christ continues to invite us into a relationship with Him. He never gives up on us. In this tumultuous world we live in, added layers of distractions and challenges pull us away from Christ. My hope and prayer for each of us through Advent is to remember and focus on the fact that Christ is always seeking each of us, no matter how distracted and broken we are, and that we are to seek Him. Always!

—George Kolb ’84 VSB, P ’23, Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations
They will run and not grow weary.

(Is 40:31)
Our second week of spiritually preparing for the birth of our Savior has begun. How are our preparations progressing? We also are two weeks away from the secular arrival of Santa Claus. Oh, the shopping, wrapping, decorating, baking, card-writing, entertaining and merrymaking pressures we face!

Can we approach the clash between our faith-based preparations and the busyness at this time by another avenue? Today’s readings depict the gifts that God provides for us. He infuses us with hope, kindness and compassion. He is merciful and gracious. He forgives and heals us. But how can we absorb the enormity of these gifts when our attention is directed elsewhere?

Perhaps the gift of Kairos—“God’s time”—will help. Kairos is a retreat designed for high school seniors, who along with adult and student leaders, break away from the activities, responsibilities and pressures of school, sports, jobs, college applications and chores. The retreatants reflect on their faith through personal insights, prayer, Mass, discussions and presentations. Music is an important component too, especially as the participants share the impact of God’s love and friendship, as well as obstacles to God’s blessings.

I wish each of us “God’s time”—to sit quietly and hear the prayers in our hearts; to feel the stirring of our souls from softly playing music; to give thanks for God’s blessings. May His gifts of hope, grace, mercy, healing, strength and unending love surround us.

—Melinda (DiCarlo) Joyce ’79 CLAS
Nothing will be impossible for God.

(Lk 1:37)
The story of our Lady of Guadalupe is the story of Jesus, who chose to empty Himself of all privilege, to be born and live as we do, taking the form of a servant, a slave! God chose our Lady of Guadalupe, a young, brown, illiterate woman, worthless in the eyes of others, to be the mother of His beloved son so that we could understand that God fully identifies with every one of us, but especially with those who are dehumanized and disenfranchised. The Word of God made flesh chose to speak with a Galilean accent and was mocked and belittled because of that.

Today we are invited to appreciate that, in Mary, our Lady of Guadalupe, every race and color, every people and language, are vibrant and dynamic threads weaving the diverse tapestry of the reign of God. Through Mary the tender love of God accompanies us, invites us to be a bridge between heaven and earth, makes us fully aware of our true worth. Mary said to Juan Diego over five centuries ago: *Tú vales,* you are valuable! She announces that Good News to us today. We are valuable for who we are, not for what we have. Our worth, our dignity, does not flow from our possessions or the color of our skin. We are the People of God, and today we celebrate the mother of God, patroness of the Americas, our Lady of Guadalupe.

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, Assistant Vice President, Mission and Ministry
Wisdom is vindicated by her works.

(Mt 11:19)
In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us about the pitfalls of judgment. Blinded by judgment, the people are unable to see the truth in the hearts of Jesus and John. Today’s world is increasingly filled with judgment, with political views dividing families and severing lifelong friendships. Members of opposing parties speak of each other with contempt bordering on hatred.

During one of my favorite sermons at Villanova (almost 30 years ago), the priest stood in front of the student congregation, hands held high in the air, holding a large exercise band that had the word “MURDER” written on it. Conceding that none of us was likely to commit murder, he asked us to consider a deeper meaning of the fifth commandment. Stretching the rubber band and flipping it over, he revealed the word “HATRED.” He taught that to have hatred or contempt for another one of God’s children is to break this commandment.

During Advent, let us honor God’s teaching, as we are called to do in the First Reading. “If only you would attend to my commandments, your peace would be like a river” (Is 48:18). We can prepare our hearts to renew relationships with family and friends. Instead of judging our brothers and sisters in Christ for what we see on the outside, we can make room again for them because we know the truth about who they are: sons and daughters of God.

—Elizabeth Gory ’92 CLAS

READING
Is 48:17-19

PSALM
Ps 1:1-4, 6

GOSPEL
Mt 11:16-19
Protect what your right hand has planted.

(Ps 80:16)
“How awesome are you, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds!” (Sir 48:4).

This verse in today’s First Reading stands out as I reflect on the wondrous deeds we can do for others during Advent. At Villanova, there is no shortage of opportunities to help others. God calls us to serve all the time, but we are especially aware of it during Advent.

Whether we donate to a food drive or collect gifts for families in need, there’s a deeper satisfaction in knowing we’re making someone’s Christmas better. The simplest of gestures goes a long way toward helping parents struggling to make ends meet or a family dealing with a hardship.

When I reflect on Christmas as a child, it’s filled with warm memories and traditions that my family enjoyed together. Playing a small part in helping others—oftentimes those we don’t know—to create memories with their loved ones makes our service during Advent all the more rewarding.

“LORD, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved” is today’s responsorial psalm. Our service to others brings us one step closer to seeing His face.

—Matthew Kirsch, Assistant Director of Communication and Marketing, Office of the Provost
Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.

(Jas 5:8)
Hope is evident in today’s readings. The prophet Isaiah promises that when God comes, “then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag” (35:5–6). In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus fulfills these and other Old Testament prophecies when He instructs the disciples of John the Baptist, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (11:4–5).

The Letter of James highlights two aspects of hope. James encourages us to be patient “until the coming of the Lord” (5:7). He also urges us to be prepared and “make your hearts firm because the coming of the Lord is at hand” (5:8). James’ expectancy that Jesus will return mirrors our own anticipation of Christmas.

In Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptist’s disciples ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (11:3). Their search for the Messiah illustrates the hope we foster this Advent.

Just as disciples of John the Baptist were seeking and so encountered the Messiah, may we, too, seek with hope our own encounter with Jesus.

—Gerald Dierkes, Access and Collections Coordinator, Falvey Library

**READING**
- Is 35:1-6a, 10
- Jas 5:7-10

**PSALM**
- Ps 146:6-10

**GOSPEL**
- Mt 11:2-11
Guide me in your truth and teach me.

(Ps 25:5)
In today’s Gospel, the chief priests and elders ask Jesus who gave Him the authority to teach. When Jesus questions them about whether John’s baptism is “of heavenly or of human origin” (Mt 21:25), they have no answer.

It can be easy, sometimes, to question God’s authority. We may ask, “Why have You ordered things as such?” We may demand signs. We want God’s works to be explained.

Jesus tells the elders, “Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.” This may seem like a cryptic response. However, I think Jesus is saying that God’s complexity is beyond human understanding. Rather, we should have faith and trust that the Good Shepherd cares for each sheep in His flock.

The Responsorial Psalm today says, “Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me” (Ps 25:4–5). Perhaps, as we approach the coming of Christ this season, instead of demanding “why,” we should entreat “guide me” and “teach me.”

—Annelise Laughlin ’21 CLAS
Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

(Mt 1:16)
Renewed interest in genealogy is growing due to 23andMe and other resources for DNA genetic testing and analysis. We are curious creatures, who desire to know our family line. We look to our ancestors to learn about ourselves.

Genealogies and names have great significance in Scripture. Our readings for today invite us into a family history that provided the conditions for Jesus’ coming. In Genesis, we read about Jacob’s sons. Judah is the kingly line from which “the scepter shall never depart” (49:10). Through this kingly line flows justice that ushers in peace. From this kingly line, individuals rise up to defend their people and to save the children of the poor.

In the Gospel passage from Matthew, we read the genealogical line of Jesus Christ. The New Testament begins with family; it beckons us to see human solidarity through generations. It reveals that Jesus is born into a broken, sinful, courageous, desperate, repentant, noble and grace-filled family. Notice that Jesus’ saving grace and gift of justice have redeeming power even for his family. Jesus reigns as a fully righteous king. Jesus uplifts women; he does not control, possess or use them. Jesus enters into solidarity with His Jewish lineage, while welcoming all people into His family. May we give thanks for our family and enter into solidarity with our human family in pursuit of justice and love.

—Audra Goodnight, PhD, Catherine of Siena Teaching Fellow, Ethics

READING
Gn 49:2, 8-10

PSALM
Ps 72:1-4b, 7-8, 17

GOSPEL
Mt 1:1-17
The lives of the poor he shall save.

(Ps 72:13)
It’s one week until Christmas. Do you have a lot to do? Exams? Papers? Shopping? Have you taken time to reflect on this upcoming feast and the presence of God in your life? If so, great! If not, it’s never too late!

In our readings, we hear God called “the LORD our Justice” (Jer 23:6), “Jesus” and “Emmanuel” (Mt 1:21, 23). These different titles show us some of the attributes of God. Pope Francis, when referring to the justice of God, says that “Mercy” is God’s Name. How have we received and given mercy this Advent?

St. Joseph is an important figure in the Infancy Narrative. Had he decided to turn Mary in for being unfaithful, Mary and the Christ Child could have been stoned to death. Instead, Joseph, kind and merciful, was going to divorce her “quietly.” Then, because he was so tuned in to the presence of God, he was able to hear and respond positively to the Messenger of God, even though he didn’t understand all of the message. Are we tuned in to the presence of God? Are we aware of the messengers God sends to us?

During this next week, amid all the noise and busyness, find some quiet moments to recognize God Who Is With Us. Share that presence with family and friends, the poor and the lowly. Let us find small ways to share the love and mercy of God.

—The Rev. Bernard Scianna, OSA, PhD, Director, Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life

READING
Jer 23:5-8

PSALM
Ps 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19

GOSPEL
Mt 1:18-25
You are my hope, O LORD; my trust, O God, from my youth.

(Ps 71:5)
The stories of Samson in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament are similar in many ways. Both men are chosen, prophetic liberators. Samson frees his people from their oppressors. John’s message is one of personal liberation.

Advent invites us to focus on our Augustinian invitation to embrace our own “journey within.” Like John, each of us is a unique gift of God and manifests that “our God is gracious” (the meaning of John’s name). John’s journey led him to a hermitical life as he began his ministry. He knew the purpose of his life was to announce that the promise of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus, and that is our purpose too.

John calls us to reform our lives because the kingdom of God is at hand. When John’s disciples ask Jesus if He is the one or should they look for another, Jesus asks them to tell John that the blind see, the lame walk and the poor have the good news preached to them. Jesus knew that when John heard the answer, he would know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise.

Our Advent journey asks us to accept that we are the graciousness of God and to serve in building the kingdom of the Prince of Peace and the Lord of Lords. May Christ be reborn in you who look to announce the Good News.

—The Rev. Dennis Harten, OSA

READING
Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a

PSALM
Ps 71:3-4a, 5-6b, 16-17

GOSPEL
Lk 1:5-25
Of his Kingdom there will be no end.

(Lk 1:33)
As my husband and I prepare to welcome our first child this Christmas season, today’s Gospel resonates with me in a different way than it has before. After months of carefully preparing (as much as we can prepare) for the little person we’re about to welcome into our lives, I can’t imagine the bewilderment, fear and anxiety Mary must have felt when she received this shocking news—and, most of all, the feeling of being utterly unprepared.

Upon the angel’s arrival, Luke tells us that Mary “was greatly troubled” (1:29). And, yet, just a few lines later, her response is one of complete and unwavering faith: “May it be done according to your word” (1:38). What could possibly inspire such a change of heart in such a short time?

That’s what I feel like I’m seeing for the first time in this Gospel today: the comfort and reassurance in the angel’s words to her—and to all of us. You are full of grace. The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid. Nothing will be impossible for God.

When I’m feeling unprepared or undeserving or uncomprehending, I hope to return to these words and cling, as Mary did, to the grace of God and the strength it provides us to take on any role God has in store.

—Colleen Donnelly, Assistant Director, Constituent Publications
Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and our shield.

(Ps 33:20)
With the hustle and bustle of secular preparations and celebrations, it is easy to overlook—but important to remember—the true meaning of and reason for the season. Today’s readings are a reminder that Advent is an opportunity to move forward from times of trouble, to seek forgiveness and to forgive, to reaffirm our faith, and to prepare for the arrival of our Lord and Savior. “For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone” (Sg 2:11).

We emerge from ever-increasing periods of darkness and tragedy, and we look forward to a new season of rebirth and growth. “The LORD has removed the judgment against [us]” and “has turned away [our] enemies” (Zep 3:15). We pray for forgiveness of our sins and in return, we are called to forgive those who have wronged us.

As we await the birth of Jesus, Advent also marks a time for renewing our faith in God, “for in him our hearts rejoice” and “in his holy name we trust” (Ps 33:21). When we make it a priority to reaffirm our faith, to remember the true meaning of the season and to welcome God into our hearts, He “will rejoice over [us] with gladness, and renew [us] in his love” (Zep 3:17).

—Andrew Pellens ’10 CLAS, Graduate Enrollment and Programs Coordinator, Engineering
Through him we have received the grace of apostleship.

(Rom 1:5)
Today is the final Sunday of our preparation for the feast of Emmanuel. This heightened sense of anticipation is marvelous, but, in some sense, alien to us. We stand in awe before a God who chooses to come to us in the form of a helpless infant, born in poverty to enrich us with the Good News that we are loved and saved. We feel we do not deserve this immense gift. Like Joseph in today’s Gospel, we can feel unworthy of the honor of discovering God in our hearts and our lives.

We are indeed unworthy, not because we have little of this world’s goods, but because we have so little humility. We don’t want to accept this gift, we want to earn it, to deserve it!

But God’s ways are not our ways. It is not by our social standing or bank accounts that God values us. God loves us because we have been created in the image and likeness of God, each person imbued with dignity. God’s passion is that we grow to be fully alive—that we all be able to develop our full potential and be willing to place what God gives us at the service of others.

Now is the time to not only receive but also to share that gift, the awareness of the dignity of each and every person, treating all as a gift of God for me! God is with us. We discover God in one another.

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, Office for Mission and Ministry
All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy.

(25:10)
In every liturgical season, an image highlights the celebration. In Advent, one of the most iconic images is that of a prophet. We may have grown up with the concept that a prophet is one who can foretell the future by looking into a crystal ball. In a religious context, a prophet is one who speaks the Word of God whether it is convenient or not, if they are to be faithful to who they are. In the readings today we see two prophets, Elijah of the Old Testament and John the Baptist, the familiar New Testament prophet who prepares the way of the coming of the Christ.

John does not fully understand who he is preparing the way for, but he goes about the countryside preaching a message of repentance. He leads a difficult life living in the desert, eating unusual food and being scorned as a madman. But this does not stop John. He is compelled to continue to speak of the coming of the Lord.

Do we have prophets today? Are they necessary? They are indeed, for we must continually come to know, and know again, the presence of God in our lives and our world. Each baptized person is called to be a priest, prophet and king, to speak the Word of God whether it is convenient or inconvenient. Do we make God known to others by the way we live? Are we good prophets?

—The Rev. Anthony Burrascano, OSA, Campus Ministry

**READING**
Mal 3:1-4, 23-24

**PSALM**
Ps 25:4-5b, 8-10, 14

**GOSPEL**
Lk 1:57-66
The favors of the LORD I will sing forever.

(Ps 89:2)
With the arrival this evening of the Nativity and the Christmas season, we are given the promise of hope and renewal in a newborn child, unburdened for now by the weight of what the adult Christ will experience. As we celebrate, we remind ourselves of our roots and our dedication to family—our merged families, our chosen families and all those we love.

In the Gospel reading for this morning, we hear of the infant John the Baptist’s future role in preparing the way for Jesus, his cousin, whose birth has been announced to Mary. John’s father, Zechariah, speaks this prophecy: “You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the LORD to prepare his ways” (Lk 1:76). We see a family with hope and faith for what is to come while honoring their ties to David and to Abraham before him. This is a family, like our own, and a story with a rich and intertwined history.

Let us all celebrate this Christmas with our loved ones, renew our sense of togetherness and take stock of our heavenly gifts as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child: born humbly in a cave, surrounded by those who loved him and given the gifts of a king.

—Christine Nass, Assistant Director of Music Activities
Isaiah shares with us the hope of Jesus restoring what is broken, what is wrong and unjust. One day, when we see the new heaven and new earth (Is 65:17), we will be made whole again. God promised us a radical new global kingdom. We are seeing a picture where the wolf and the lamb are grazing together, and the child is playing next to cobra. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God, and this knowledge will make profound and pervasive changes. Perfect peace, restoration, absolute justice. Future hope. Halleluiah!

The Bible mentions two Hebrew words for justice: mishpat and tzadeqah (Keller, 2010). Numerous times in the Bible the word mishpat is used to describe taking care of the widows, orphans, poor and immigrants. While rectifying justice of mishpat can be seen in our government attempts to bring help to the orphans, change immigration laws and prosecute loan companies who prey on the poor and the elderly; another form of justice, tzadeqah, brings primary justice and it hits home. Primary justice, or tzadeqah, may mean to look at our neighborhoods and see if we can take our personal time to meet the needs of the elderly, hungry or handicapped. It could also mean to establish a nonprofit to help those in need, or possibly adopt an inner-city school and make generous donations or pro bono work there. God is concerned about the vulnerable ones. Can we pray to have His heart for the vulnerable now?

The grace of God has appeared, saving all. (Ti 2:11)
Merry Christmas!
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