2023 Advent Reflections
from the Villanova University Community
Advent is a good time to be still, listen, slow down, and wait. Yet, we are also told to “Be watchful! Be alert!” (MK 13:33). This time of quiet anticipation can also be a time of outward excitement.

As believers in a God who cares deeply for all of us, it is our duty to care for each other, to be in fellowship. As we focus on our desires in this time, may we also be mindful of those who have less, those who are marginalized and forgotten.

May we work for peace and pray for healing in our world. May we be watchful of and alert to the many ways in which God calls us to act, rest, wait, and bring forth God’s glory.

—Kate Giancatarino
Senior Director,
St. Thomas of Villanova Center for the Common Good

How do we reconcile opposing acts of rest and action; of waiting and proclaiming?

First Sunday of Advent
December 3, 2023

In the midst of carols, ornaments and gift-wrapping, we can lose ourselves and overlook what Advent is really about. This resource from Villanova University’s Office for Mission and Ministry is intended as a reminder to accompany us as we make our way toward celebrating the wonderful gift of God’s unfathomable and infinite love for each one and all of us, in fact, for all of creation. God with us.

Advent is a time of active, restless anticipation, waiting with intention and attention. We await the fulfillment of God’s plan, determined before time began, that we all might flourish and enjoy life in abundance, knowing ourselves to be loved beyond our merits. God takes the initiative and encourages us to grow in our grateful response to God’s unmerited and boundless love.

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God, where in my life are you planting your spirit and looking for me to grow? Do I live my life in a way that draws others closer to your just love?

God’s glory, God’s justice, and God’s plan all come to root in God’s time. He has had a plan for every one of us since the beginning of time, and His plan WILL come to fruition.

He seeks to plant His root, His spirit, in each of us. From the withered stump of Jesse, God can bring about glory sought after by all nations. May our hearts be softened, our spirits humbled, and our eyes be opened to see how God and His plan is working in us, so we may help to share his kingdom with the world.

—John Surry, ’02 ’05 COE

How can I better reflect the power and love of the Eucharist?

While on retreat at the beautiful Loyola on the Potomac Retreat House in Maryland, we considered today’s Gospel, where a centurion approaches Jesus to seek healing for his servant, saying, “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).

I immediately recognized this passage from the Prayer before Communion at Mass. As Catholics, we believe God is fully present in the Eucharist. We’re unworthy to receive this most holy gift unless our soul—in this sense, the “roof”—is fully prepared.

During Advent, as we await the birth of Jesus, let us consider how we prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist and HOW God’s love and support sustain us.” May we recognize and appreciate the comfort and joy that God’s love provides each day.

—Giulia McPherson, ’99 CLAS

**IS 11:1-10**

**PS 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17**

**LK 10:21-24**

**IS 2:1–5**

**PS 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9**

**MT 8:5-11**

“May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings” (PS 122:7).

“But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” (IS 11:1).
The same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. (Rom 10:12)

Who has been an Ambrose to me in my restlessness to build my relationship with God on rock? To whom might I be an Ambrose?

In Isaiah, we read that with salvation comes a “feast of rich food and choice wines” (IS 25:6). The psalmist describes God spreading a table with a cup filled to overflowing (PS 23:5). And in the Gospel, Jesus turns a scanty supply of bread and fish into abundance. While eating sustains the body, God’s love nourishes the spirit.

When we gather with glad hearts to share lovingly prepared, bountiful feasts, may our fellowship resonate with Christ’s love so all can “taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (PS 34:8).

They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full” (Mt 15:37).

How can I prepare my heart to receive the fullness of Christ’s love and reflect it to those around my holiday table this Christmas season?

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Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Ambrose (340-397), who tremendously influenced the young, restless Augustine. Augustine tells us that God led him to Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and then Ambrose led Augustine to God. This relationship enabled Augustine to establish a firm relationship with God, moving from shifting sand to solid rock.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Savior, the manifestation of God’s unconditional and constant love for us, may this special season of Advent help move us from sand to rock in building our relationship with God.

—The Rev. Bill Waters, OSA, ’68 MA

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—Nan Schiller, ’84 VSB
This Advent, consider how God knows your needs and fulfills them. How can you meet the needs of others?

IS 30:19-21, 23-26
PS 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
MT 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8

God’s knowledge of our human needs becomes apparent in today’s readings. We learn that Jesus’s “heart was moved with pity ... because [the crowds] were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd” (MT 9:36). He empowers the twelve disciples and sends them to aid those in need. Jesus goes so far as to instruct them to give themselves “without cost” (MT 10:8).

As humans, we depend on both God and our neighbor. This interconnectedness is fundamental to a thriving community.

In the spirit of Advent, of hoping and anticipating the birth of our Savior, we humbly ask God to reveal to us how to fulfill our needs and the needs of our community and how best we can proclaim God’s goodness.

—Megan Dettloff, ’24 FCN

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK
DECEMBER 9, 2023

The temptation in the garden precedes today’s first reading. Satan convinces Eve to eat the fruit because it will make her like God.

We’re all like Eve. We want to be our own God. We want control over everything in our lives—our health, children, financial security, careers.

Fast forward to first-century Palestine. There, an uneducated peasant woman from a back-water town exhibited the greatest of all virtues: to trust in God’s plan, even though outrageous. Although she never had relations, Mary was told that she was pregnant and that her baby would fulfill the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Whatever plans Mary had for her life at that point, she discarded them and said “yes” to God’s plan.

—Patrick Campbell, Jr., ’88 JD

How we can accept and trust in God’s plan like Mary did?

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This Advent, consider how God knows your needs and fulfills them. How can you meet the needs of others?
What is a desert in your life that you have been ignoring or pushing aside? Where can you be healed, renewed, and uplifted?

The Lord God comes not only to save but also to heal, transform, and sanctify. More than being saved from Hell, we are being saved into Heaven. Christ became man not to make us merely nice or good but to make us perfect, like Himself.

The Author of Life has the authority to forgive sins, but what is there to forgive if we call ourselves sinless? What use is the yoke of guilt with no hope, no Cross? We must submit ourselves to both His vindication and His forgiveness.

The desert is barren before it blooms. The sick are infirm before their healing. Who God calls blind must consent to be made seeing. Repenting, we turn away from sin and towards God.

How joyous it is to hear the Lord Jesus calling to us every day, "your sins are forgiven" and "rise, pick up your mat, and walk" (LK 5:23-24).

—Joshua Tsai, '23 CLAS

How will you share gifts of joy and hope this season, not presents of monetary value?

—Kathleen Pietras-Innella '24 FCN

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What is a desert in your life that you have been ignoring or pushing aside? Where can you be healed, renewed, and uplifted?
“Para Dios, nada es imposible.” Dijo María: “Yo soy la servidora del Señor, hágase en mí tal como has dicho.” Después la dejó el ángel (Lucas 1:37-38). María dijo que sí, pero no fue fácil. La fe de María sería puesta a prueba todos los días. Ser la madre del Hijo de Dios traería grandes cambios a su vida que requerían entrega y sacrificio, pero ella estuvo dispuesta a todo y se comprometió fielmente a Dios.

—Marisol Lezcano, Hispanic/Latine Ministry, and Ana Sofia Guizar Salazar, Graduate Resident Minister ’25

Yo te pregunto, ¿Estás dispuesto a decir “Sí” a Dios, a la invitación que Él te hace; estás dispuesto a comprometerte a servir a Dios? ¿Quieres decir que “Sí” como lo hizo María?

For nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:37-38). Mary said yes, but it was not easy. Mary’s faith would be challenged every day. To be the mother of the Son of God would bring great changes to her life that would require surrender and sacrifice, but she was willing to do anything, and she committed faithfully to God.

—Marisol Lezcano, Hispanic/Latine Ministry, and Ana Sofia Guizar Salazar, Graduate Resident Minister ’25

I ask you, are you prepared to say “Yes” to God, to the invitation that He makes to you? Are you willing to commit yourself to serve God? Would you like to say, “Yes” like Mary did?
As we journey through life, if we stay connected to God and live according to His precepts, we will lead a peaceful, joy-filled life with the promise of eternal glory with God in heaven.

“The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth” (IS 40:28). God created us to know, love, and serve Him. When I feel frustrated or overwhelmed on my journey, I can turn to God, who can help me along: “For my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (MT 11:30).

God will always guide us and help us to walk in a strong, faithful pathway if we make God the center of our lives.

—Lucy Dierkes
Friend of Villanova

Do you try to love others as God loves us?

In Advent, God reminds us of His offer of love, which He made at the beginning of time when creation came to be through His words and actions. Even when creation derailed, God, for the sake of love, became incarnate through His word and dwelt among us for the salvation of humanity.

The tale of love is indeed endless. Love is the elixir of life that strengthens the frail nature of humanity and heals to the marrow. A heart that loves and receives love is bound to experience hope, peace, joy, and love, which are the four marks of Advent.

Let us emulate this act of love from our Creator in this season of Advent and beyond to impact the lives of those less fortunate.

Since God is love, like God, just as we bear image the image of Christ, let us love.

—Samuel Odidi
Graduate Resident Minister ’25
“He knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness’ sake.”
No, these aren’t words of Scripture, but they are words we often recite during this time of year. We sing these words and tell them to children throughout the season. Isaiah 48:17-19 calls out to the people of Israel to pay attention and to follow the way of their God, who desires to lead them for their good.

How amazing is having a God who wants what is best for us? In a world where we so often see the atrocities that people inflict on one another, we can rejoice in the One who desires to be in a relationship with us for our good and for the sake of the world.

—Kristen Muse, ’20 VSB

What teaching or commandment of God do you need to pay attention to this Advent season?

IS 48:17-19
PS 11-2, 3, 4 and 6
MT 11:16-19

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (LK 3:4, 6). 

SIR 48:1-4, 9-11
PS 80:2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19
MT 17:9a, 10-13

In today’s readings, we hear Elijah’s role in trying to convince the people that they should turn away from evil and back to God to be saved. While some followed his words, others did not. Similarly, people did the same to Jesus when He came to spread the good news. Instead of listening to Him, they persecuted Him, and He suffered.

It seems we still are dealing with these issues. We have trouble repenting, being ready for Jesus, and recognizing Him in those around us. We don’t easily turn to faith and to God. Like before, we don’t heed the warnings to prepare for God.

There is much strife in our world, with little trust and faith in humankind, especially among those who are different from each other. Can we use Advent to prepare for Jesus to play a stronger role in our lives?

—Joyce Russell,
Dean Emeritus and Professor, VSB

How can we be like Elijah and serve as a role model of God’s teachings?
The culture of joy is an integral thread in the fabric of our identity in God and a vibrant reality in Jesus. This joy of anticipating the birth of Christ is not an anomaly; rather, it is a gentle reminder to infuse joy and gratitude into every facet of our journey, despite our expectations. This joy, akin to hope, finds its foundation in God’s unwavering fidelity, in the absolute assurance of God’s promises fulfilled and that God will be with us until the end of the world.

With unwavering confidence in God’s faithful love, may we joyfully “Shout aloud and sing for joy!” (PS 12:6) as the dawn of His birth approaches. In this season of celebration, let joy and gratitude become an inseparable part of our experience, a radiant reflection of the enduring promises of our loving Creator.

—Rev. Dada Deji, ’20 MSCM

How can we actively develop and spread the culture of joy in every stage of our lives, making it a living testament to God’s unwavering fidelity?

These readings remind me of hope for a new beginning as we anticipate the birth of Christ. It’s significant for me this Advent season, amid worldwide divisiveness and ongoing wars, to reflect on what the prophet Jeremiah faced that must have seemed hopeless. Still, Jeremiah proclaimed hope for a new future built on goodness, love, peace, and security for all through his unwavering faith and commitment to God.

Perhaps now is not the time to feel despair. Perhaps now is the time to renew our hope for a world not based on hate and differences but on love and harmony. The best way to bring that message of hope is not to focus on what divides us but on what unites us in all we think, say, and do.

—Ross A. Lee, PhD
Professor of Practice, Sustainable Engineering

How can I bring hope to the world through being kind and loving to others?
Today’s readings highlight amazing ways that God’s timing enters the world and furthers the unfolding of His perfect plan.

God chooses two childless older women at just the right time (despite human belief to the contrary) to play significant roles in salvation history. In response to the news that she will bear a son with a special mission, Elizabeth proclaims, “So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit…” (LK 1:25).

As we journey through Advent, preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ, let’s focus on “God’s time,” ever-present and at work in and around us.

—Seton (Alves) Feeney ‘92

From “How Can It Be?” to “Let It Be.”

The words of Mary, Mother of Jesus and Our Mother of Good Counsel, show us how to move through life’s challenges by discerning God’s Presence, God’s call. She listens, reflects, questions, and responds.

Similarly, St. Joseph, in a song by Michael Card called “Joseph’s Song,” moves from “How can it be” to “Show me how I fit into this plan of Yours!” He, too, must listen, reflect, question, and respond.

May we recognize the signs and blessings all around us and in us that show that Christ IS present, born in us, and made known through us! May we share God’s message of peace and joy to all we meet!

—The Rev. Bernard Scianna, OSA
Sr. Associate Dean of Students for Student Support

How has “God’s time” unfolded in your life?

How will you make Christ present during this holy season?
Today’s Gospel gives us an example of unwavering faith. Through her relationship with Mary, Elizabeth shows us how to believe wholeheartedly. Without question or explanation, Elizabeth understands that Mary is pregnant and that her baby is Jesus: “And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (LK 1:43)?

This interaction of faith between Elizabeth and Mary stands in contrast to an earlier Gospel passage. In Luke 1:18, Zechariah does not show steadfast faith in the Lord. He feels drawn to question the Lord’s words rather than unquestioningly believe them.

At one time or another, we identify with either Elizabeth or Zechariah. Let us continue our Advent journey, trying to live more like Elizabeth.

—Siobhan Cooney, ’14 CLAS

How can I improve my faith and believe wholeheartedly in God?

SG 2:8-14 or ZEP 3:14-18a
PS 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21
LK 1:39-45

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR” (LK 1:47).

Today’s readings concern hope. Hannah rejoices that God has given her a son, Samuel, but she looks beyond her own needs, pledging that Samuel will do good and proclaiming that God always helps those in need. Centuries later, Mary echoes Hannah, thanking God for what he has done for her personally (sending her a son) and praying for a better future for her people.

In time, Mary’s son, Jesus, unites these concerns for the self and the world, teaching his followers to live honestly and with compassion. Jesus—God incarnate—leads us to personal salvation and the creation of a just society. If Easter stands for new life, then Christmas stands for the promise that new life will come. These readings remind us, too, of a parent’s hopes and dreams when a child is born.

—Dan Gorman ’16 MA

What are your hopes for your family and the world for the year ahead?
God chose Elizabeth and Zechariah to conceive and bear a son, John. This child, a long-awaited gift to the older couple who remained faithful to God and had not given up hope, “will be called a prophet of the Most High; ... will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him” (Lk 1:76).

With Christmas just a few days away, have you shared your Christmas list with God? Your list of what you hold deep within your heart, much like Elizabeth and Zechariah’s lifelong hope for a child? Imagine the angel Gabriel saying to you, “Do not be afraid; your prayer has been heard” (Lk 1:13).

In Advent, God is asking us to anticipate with bold faith and unceasing hope, to be open to God’s love, born on Christmas day, knowing that Jesus—Emmanuel—is with us always.

—Michelle Evaul, ’98, ’00 VSB

The angel appears to Mary and asks her to consent to the unbelievable. The baby is born in poverty and, by tradition, born at midnight, the darkest part of the night. The poor becomes our richness; the darkness vanished by the Light.

Mary says “yes” in the “obedience of faith” St. Paul talks about. “Yes” to God’s plan, not her own. Joseph will do the same, so a “holy family” is born. God shows to David that this special presence has been throughout salvation history. Thus, we believe that we have a direction in life because a child was born to us, Christ the Savior. In the middle of violence or injustice, darkness is not the final word.

God breaks into our world in a crib with a light that changes midnight to a new rising dawn, raising us up, being our Wonder Counselor, Prince of Peace. Rejoice, Life and Light is with us.

—Rev. John J. Lydon, OSA
Center for Faith and Learning
Office for Mission and Ministry
Let us announce
the coming of our
Savior with joy!
—St. Augustine,
Sermon 190, 3