2018 Advent Reflections
from the Villanova Community
“Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rv 22:20). This second-to-last verse of the New Testament is also the prayer of the first season of the Christian liturgical year: Advent.

In these four weeks leading up to Christmas, the faithful prepare to celebrate the moment in history when the Light came into the world. In remembrance of the Nativity, we pray, Come, Lord Jesus!

We also look forward to when the King of Glory will return, and those who have abided in God’s love shall see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2). In the hope of eternal life, we pray, Come, Lord Jesus!

Finally, we ask for the grace to welcome Jesus every moment of every day, especially in those whom society deems unworthy. In our commitment to solidarity, we pray, Come, Lord Jesus!

Through our daily reading of the following Scripture passages and reflections, may we journey through Advent as an Augustinian community, one in mind and heart. Let it be for all people, not just ourselves or those we love, that we pray, Come, Lord Jesus!
May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. (1 Thes 3:12)
Rejoice in hopeful anticipation! In the first reading today, God promises a savior, a just shoot from the house of David. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of God's merciful restoration, which offers hope despite Israel's impending judgment for idolatry and corruption. Psalm 25 reinforces that those who wait on our Lord will turn from evil and be guided to justice and truth.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus declares that we must “be vigilant at all times” (21:36). Jesus tells us of the terrifying signs that will accompany his Second Coming so that we will recognize them and not be shaken with fear. The foreknowledge of these signs prompts us to prepare our hearts for the Lord. Christ wants us to be attentive to the Gospel, which calls us to care for the widow and the orphan. He urges us to dispel apathy and bring about the justice of his kingdom. I find myself asking, what indifferences emerge in my life from daily distractions that prevent me from sharing a deeper relationship with Christ? Do I strive to care for the impoverished, the imprisoned and the afflicted, or do I retreat to a comfortable passivity?

By remembering that Emmanuel abides with us, we are strengthened to face daily trials. A vigilant heart burning for Christ will not be startled by the wonders of his Second Coming but will instead praise God like the angels who sang at Christ's birth, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Lk 2:14).

—Christina Dietzler ’20 CLAS
The mountain of the LORD’s house shall be ... raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it. (IS 2:2)
The words spoken by the Roman centurion to Jesus—“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)—move us: the humility and faith shown by this man; the lengths to which he goes for his servant; the trust that Jesus’ word is enough. The soldier’s statement is not one of “blind faith” but a recognition that Jesus has an authority to command, a power to bring about change from a distance. This acknowledgement amazes Jesus, who has not seen such faith in all of Israel.

We are suspicious of authority—and, unfortunately, have legitimate reasons for our suspicion. Authority and abuse seem to go together. To bow to another’s authority seems tantamount to endorsing tyranny.

Isaiah gives us a vision of righteous authority. When the God of Jacob exercises authority, the nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (2:4). Jesus embodies this paradigm of authority: to exercise power in such a way as to enable humans to imagine an alternative to violence and work together to achieve a common good.

In the Roman Catholic liturgy, we repeat the words of the centurion before participating in the Eucharistic feast. Let us ponder whether we also accept the authority of the Lord, an authority that demands that we blunt the edges of our pride and anger, and that we begin to imagine how we might cultivate the good with our family, friends and neighbors.

—Paul Camacho, PhD, Arthur J. Ennis Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities
A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. (IS 11:1)
The Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah today reminds us to treat our fellow citizens of the world with dignity and humility, regardless of our differences. “Not by appearance shall he judge, not by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted” (11:3–4). In the Gospel, Jesus rejoices that the Lord has revealed his wonders to the childlike, while hiding them from the wise and learned.

Has the Lord revealed to us the call to judge others justly? Are we enlightened yet childlike? Are we waiting for the wise and learned to lead us, or do we understand that each of us has a role in making the world a better place? In today’s world, this might mean advocating for our common good, equal rights, a living wage, and access to adequate food, housing and health care.

Viewed through the lens of solidarity, the reading calls us to act with empathy, to develop relationships with those around us and to examine our call to act justly. Do we stand up for those who need it and against those who seek to harm our fellow humans?

Isaiah tells us that “the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them” (11:6). With the divisiveness plaguing society today, it seems the world has forgotten this important lesson.

—Michelle M. Kelly, PhD, CRNP, Assistant Professor, M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing
On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines. (Isaiah 25:6)
Advent is a time of waiting imbued with expectant hope. In today’s Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus heals the lame, the blind, the deformed and the mute, and he links this action with the feeding of the crowd. The great crowds that follow Jesus along the Sea of Galilee witness the physical healing and social reconciliation of the outcast as glorifying God.

We prepare for Eucharist and anticipate the Light of the World breaking into history by practicing solidarity with the marginalized in our time. Christian hope is eschatological, which is to say that welcoming the stranger recognizes Christ already in our midst, even as we wait on the redemption of the world. Indeed, fellowship born from healing relationships of solidarity is Eucharistic.

Matthew’s account of the feeding of the crowds heightens the role of the disciples as intermediaries between Jesus and the crowd. In the breaking of the bread, Jesus transforms the disciples’ fear of scarcity into a reality of overabundant sustenance. How often do we succumb to the fear that what we have is not enough? Today the Gospel reminds us that we all have something to give, whether it is time, talent or material resources. Sharing ourselves in relationships of solidarity, particularly with the poor and marginalized, is one way we can practice eschatological hope during Advent. Our highly divided, polarized and tribal world desperately awaits such transformative healing.

—Timothy Hanchin, PhD, Assistant Professor, Theology and Religious Studies
Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just, one that keeps faith. (IS 26:2)
I was five years old, sitting in Sunday school, singing a song based on our Gospel reading today. How we enjoyed smacking our hands to the lyrics, “The house on the sand went splat!” My friends and I couldn’t imagine then the social responsibility this summary of the Sermon on the Mount would call us to as adults. What a vivid metaphor of the requirements for true disciples: listening to the words of Jesus and acting on them, even during life’s storms.

The Old Testament reading is a hymn with similar images. The prophet offers us words of comfort and hope during a time of distress and confusion. When those who are lofty shake our institutions and threaten to reorganize our society, we have a strong, resistant community. Prejudice and oppression will have to go because the standards of God hold firm. Fairness will rise and bring peace. We trust that God is our Rock.

The psalmist sings a song of believing expectation, a promise that God has the last word, the anticipation of the one who comes to open the gates of justice to all true disciples. At that time, it will be better to take refuge in the Lord (the rock) than to trust in people or governments (the sand).

I remember how hard we youngsters planted our fists into our palms when we sang, “And the house on the rock stood firm!” As we wait for God to open the gates of justice, may we work and stand in solidarity with the poor, the needy and the oppressed as true disciples.

—Juanita Weaver, Instructor and Internship Coordinator, Communication
The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? (Ps 27:1)
Happy Feast of St. Ambrose, the bishop who played a pivotal role in St. Augustine’s conversion!

In the first reading we hear that, at the end, the deaf will hear, the blind will see, the poor will rejoice and the arrogant will have gone. The Gospel tells of Jesus healing three blind men, saying, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.”

How do we view the deaf, blind, poor, weak, disabled, marginalized, undocumented, persecuted—anyone who is different from us? How should we aid them? St. Ambrose tells us. “It is not enough to just wish well; we must also do well.” He also warns us that, sometimes, “silence is dangerous.”

Mission and Ministry’s theme this academic year is solidarity, an orientation of awareness and action motivated by love. We are called to understand how we might remedy systems that discriminate, marginalize or oppress people. St. Ambrose echoes this call: “One of the duties of fortitude is to keep the weak from receiving injury.”

We are blessed to have organizations and opportunities on campus that invite us to “do well” and raise our voices in support. Two of my favorite are Special Olympics and LEVEL, which focus on individuals with intellectual and/or physical differences. Campus Ministry has an inclusive menu of options for us to engage in. Review the list. Incorporate one into your classes, your curricula and your lives. Strengthen our Villanova community by fulfilling your “duty.”

—David Dinehart, PhD, Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. (LK 1:31)
How are you being called? Where are you being guided? Are you ignoring the gentle knock at your door?

As a second grader at St. Denis School in Havertown, Pa., I was undeterred by today’s first reading of Adam and Eve’s banishment from the Garden. A rule had been set, so it was no surprise in my childhood mind that a consequence would be faced. The expectation guidelines had been clear.

However, it was always Luke’s Gospel regarding the Annunciation that held weight and caused panic. What if God called me, my eight-year-old self, to rise to some sort of holy occasion? To take a role that a young grade schooler had no business being part of? I would fall asleep at night leaving God to my internal voicemail. I certainly wasn’t picking up any unwanted angelic calls.

As I read over Luke’s words again and Mary’s acceptance of her role, I continually reflect on what we miss out on when fear takes hold. How did we so easily forget our own inner divine nature? When did we begin to believe we were made for less? As the reading from Ephesians emphasizes, “In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things” (1:11). We too have favor.

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I ask, what are you being called to do today and in this Advent season? Have you been answering? Maybe it is time to start picking up those calls.

—Madeline Reynolds, Associate Director, Honors Program
The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed. (PS 126:3)
When I was younger, my mom would always tell us that we should be especially careful not to rush straight into the excitement of Christmas and skip the preparation of Advent. I remember working furiously in my own head to temper my joy and excitement, as I could think only of the fun parties, gingerbread houses and presents under the tree.

In today’s readings, however, I am reminded that God does not want us to restrain ourselves from the joy and excitement we feel in anticipating his coming. Instead, he wants us to share this joy with others and allow our excitement to build in the weeks preceding the coming of our Lord. We are called to put on God—not simply befriend him, listen to him and confide in him, but instead wrap ourselves completely from head to toe in the love and the ways of the Lord.

We find ourselves here in the second week of Advent, perhaps fighting the urge to jump to Christmas and instead urging ourselves to patiently prepare for the coming of our Savior. But God does not want us to be reserved in this waiting, in this preparation. It is not a time of inaction. Rather, he calls us to enthusiastically embrace our oneness with him. This is the only way in which we can truly “prepare the way of the Lord” (Lk 3:4).

—Cecilia Spesia ’21 CLAS
The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. (IS 35:1)
In the first reading, the people of God are reminded that God is just. He speaks of safety and security and gives us a taste of the idea that God will do the judging and that we should refrain, since he is the God of justice. The psalm, in turn, reminds the people to turn to God to find the correct path, the path to justice and humility. It reminds us that the Lord is good and upright, and he alone will show us the path to salvation.

The Gospel reading ultimately gives us a purpose to following God’s way—that purpose being a life of service to our fellow people, a life of solidarity with one another’s trials and joys. The way to God is through a life shared with others. Our actions need to be driven by what is good for those around us.

The Advent Gospel stories charge us with the task of serving one another, even in difficult times. Recently, there has been enough turmoil in the world to arouse fear in many. When we allow our lives to be led by fear, we become susceptible to an “us versus them” mentality rather than looking with the eyes of solidarity at our human experience. We are called to be vigilant, not against another, but vigilant for opportunities to encounter God with one another through challenges we face together. When fellow humans are treated poorly, injured, talked down to or stripped of their rights, the Lord entrusts us with traveling the road to salvation and solidarity with them.

—Marta Guron, PhD, Assistant Professor, Chemistry
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs. (IS 40:11)
The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has become one of the most common and recognizable ways of describing God as the caretaker of his people. Both of today’s readings depict God as a shepherd who looks after his flock with marked care and tenderness, not favoring any one sheep over another. Any extra care that the Good Shepherd gives to one sheep is given equally to all others. But what does it really mean for us? Since God already cares for us all, are we meant to act passively without regard for our brothers and sisters?

Jesus does not merely convey this story as a way of describing the nature of God. Rather, Jesus also communicates this to challenge us to care for one another just as God cares for us. God does not pick favorites. One sheep does not hold more value over any others. Instead, God recognizes the entirety of his flock as equals, all worthy of love and dignity. This is God’s wish for us.

If we truly call ourselves Christian, we must be willing to recognize the inherent and God-given dignity of all human persons. Instead of choosing to care for a select few, we are challenged by God to gain a profound love for the world and all her people. While it is undeniable that we will come across people we don’t necessarily like or want to love, God calls us to put aside our differences and hostilities to recognize our shared human nature and welcome each other in solidarity as the sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock.

—Sara Vaughan ’19 CLAS
Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word. (LK 1:38)
The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe calls to mind our brothers and sisters in Mexico, which has one of the largest and most devoted Catholic populations in the world. The escalation of crime, illegal drug trafficking and political corruption in Mexico has made it difficult for the country’s law-abiding citizens to live in peace and economic security. How might we stand in solidarity with the people of Mexico, particularly those who actively seek the will of God in their daily lives?

Along with the Annunciation, which is recounted in today’s Gospel, the story of Juan Diego offers us a model of docility to the will of God. Juan Diego, a simple, indigenous man in 16th-century Mexico, was called by Our Lady of Guadalupe to ask the local bishop to build a church in her honor. Mary, too, was called to a seemingly impossible task: to bear the Word of God. Just like Juan Diego, Mary was no one special—a woman of no significant social standing. And yet her faith and trust in God enabled her to assent to becoming the Mother of God.

When we raise questions about our vocation, seeking to know God’s will, we image Mary’s receptivity. Mary and Juan Diego show us that honor does not come from worldly measures of success, but from our cooperation with the will of God. We may not have visible signs like a tilma full of roses or a crown of stars, but when we carry Christ in our hearts and minds, we become bearers of the Good News to the world.

—Elizabeth-Jane McGuire, PhD, Assistant Professor, Augustine and Culture Seminar Program
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)
In the first reading, we learn that the God of Israel will not forsake the afflicted and the needy who seek water. Rivers on bare heights and fountains in broad valleys will open up. The desert will turn into a marshland and dry ground into springs of water. Trees will be set in the wasteland. All will see and know what the Lord has done.

In today’s Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus preaches to the crowds about John the Baptist, saying, “All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

I have the following thoughts about these two readings. God will help those who are in need and seek help, and we can rejoice in God’s kindness, love and mercy if we read the Scriptures and listen to the prophets.

In a spirit of solidarity, we must treat everyone with respect, dignity and compassion. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers and are called to be stewards of creation. This message reminds me of Luke’s story of the rich man who ignores the beggar Lazarus and ends up in Hades. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn the rich man’s brothers. No, says Abraham. They have the prophets to listen to.

Now is the time to listen to the prophets, reflect on the Scriptures and act—to put the needs of the poor, the vulnerable and the planet first to advance the common good.

—Robert J. Leggiadro, MD, ’72 CLAS, Adjunct Professor, Biology, and Geography and the Environment
I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. (IS 48:17)
How often do we face a decision and ask a friend, family member or loved one, “What should I do?” I like to feel in control and ask this question more than I should. I gather all the advice and evidence before deciding, and when I do decide, I stick to it.

Lately, though, I’ve felt drawn to a different way of making decisions. Last February, I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The decision-making process had made me extremely anxious. I talked to my mom, who had made the pilgrimage, and others about their experiences in Israel. I read articles and paid extra attention to news stories. Often, when I told someone I might travel to Israel, I was met with wide, concerned eyes.

Despite my anxiety, something called me to say yes. I felt a spark of excitement and a growing sense of delight in experiencing something new and being where Jesus had lived, died and risen from the dead.

Traveling to the Holy Land changed my life and especially how I listen to my heart. My cousin, a Jesuit priest, often asks me when I am making a decision, “Does the idea excite you? That’s God speaking to you.” God finds ways to teach us, as the prophet Isaiah says, what is for our good. He leads us in ways we can’t comprehend, guiding us to become what we are not yet. Let us be open to God’s grace and guidance. Only he knows what miracles that openness may create.

—Emily Irving ’10 CLAS, ’12 MA, Annual Fund Officer for Young Alumni Giving
How awesome are you, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! ... You were taken aloft in a whirlwind of fire. (SIR 48:4, 9)
The readings for our second week of Advent seem to focus on our preparation for experiencing God more fully in what we do and what we need to do to live better lives.

In the first reading from Sirach, we are reminded of Elijah’s fiery demonstration of God’s power working through him and the promise for him to return to “put an end to wrath” and “turn back the hearts of fathers toward their sons” (48:10). But for this to happen, we must be able to recognize him in his return, which, as the Gospel reading emphasizes, is easily missed. The readings remind me that it is sometimes difficult to recognize God in others, especially when we haven’t prepared a way.

One way to prepare may be to eliminate those actions that are blocking a closer relationship with God and our ability to recognize him in others. Today’s Gospel acclamation from Luke touches on making our paths straight so that each one of us can experience God’s grace. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: All flesh shall see the salvation of God” (3:4, 6).

Perhaps one of our greatest obstacles is not treating each other equally with kindness and love. As I reflect on this, my goal in this Advent season will be to look for opportunities to see the good in others and treat everyone with uniform and consistent kindness, dignity and respect.

—Ross A. Lee, PhD, Professor of Practice, College of Engineering
Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!

(PHIL 4:4)
God’s love calls us to be in solidarity with our siblings, as we are all God’s beloved children. With the Mission and Ministry theme of solidarity this Advent, may we take the time to reflect, renew and recommit.

May we reflect on the innate humanity, divinity and dignity in all our siblings. May we recognize that God is seated in the innermost part of our souls. May we regularly, critically and rigorously examine ourselves and understand how we contribute to or benefit from racism, discrimination, sexism, militarism and unjust economic systems. May we reflect in such a way that we find Veritas.

May we faithfully and courageously allow God’s love to renew us. May we renew ourselves so that we are unafraid to love and be loved. May we release our burdens, concerns and worries to God, as well as actions and thoughts that do not come from a place of love, and from now on, may our actions and thoughts come from a place of love. Like a newly baptized baby, may we be rejuvenated by God’s love. May we renew ourselves in such a way that we find Caritas.

May we joyfully and wholeheartedly recommit ourselves to the Body of Christ, loving and caring for all in a sustained way. May we recommit ourselves to allowing God’s luminous love to shine through us, letting our kindness be known to all. May we take responsibility for healing the suffering of our siblings. May we recommit ourselves in such a way that we find Unitas.

—Yvonne Nguyen ’19 CLAS
THIRD MONDAY OF ADVENT

Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace.
(PS 72:7)
In today’s responsorial psalm, we read the beginning of Psalm 72, which is a series of prayers for the kings in the line of David. In the Gospel today, we read of the extensive genealogy from David through 42 generations to Jesus. It’s a reminder to me of the connections we all have to generations before and after us.

In the psalm, we join in praying for the leaders of our time. We pray that justice will flourish and that leaders will govern in such a way that fairness for all is upheld. We pray that those who have been wronged and injured will be made whole again. We pray for healing and peace in our families and our communities. We pray that civic and church leaders will “defend the afflicted among the people” and “save the children of the poor” (v. 4).

The prayer of the people thousands of years ago is still true for our generation today. May the way that we love and interact with those closest to us—especially when it is challenging and difficult—and may our solidarity with the most vulnerable in our world lead to the fullness of peace forever.

—Matthew Manion ’11 MSCM, Professor of Practice and Faculty Director, Center for Church Management
Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. (MT 1:20)
Expectant parents often read up on baby names and their meanings. Many names, especially biblical ones, convey attributes that parents hope will describe their children—for example, Nathan, “gift from God”; Anna, “grace”; Timothy, “one who honors God”; or Elizabeth, “God is my oath.”

Of all the names that God could have given the Word made flesh, God reveals to Joseph in today’s Gospel that the carpenter is to give Mary’s child the name Jesus. The inseparable bond between the name and mission of Jesus is made clear by the angel: This “child will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). Moreover, the child’s name reveals who he is, for his birth fulfills the Old Testament prophecy that a son will be born of a virgin and be called Emmanuel, “God is with us.”

The first reading and psalm testify that salvation through the Incarnation has always been part of God’s loving plan. In the passage from Jeremiah, the prophet assures an exiled people that a righteous and just king is coming who will save them and restore them to their land. The psalmist announces that the king’s son will rescue the poor and helpless, and his glorious name will be blessed forever.

Every time we say, in faith, the name of Jesus, we affirm the staggering reality that God is constantly present to us. God continues to save us. God hears and rescues us. God is the source of our oneness.

—Suzanne Wentzel, Director of Research and Publications, Mission and Ministry
My mouth shall be filled with your praise, shall sing your glory every day. (PS 71:8)
In our readings, both from the book of Judges and the Gospel according to Luke, we are presented with couples who are unable to conceive a child. These couples stay strong in their belief in God’s plan and are both rewarded with children: Manoah and his wife with Samson, and Zechariah and Elizabeth with John the Baptist. These couples persevere through very difficult circumstances during their pregnancies, and both are rewarded with the greatest of gifts.

I know at times I struggle, like many, with the plan God has for me. It is only human to be impatient and anxious for remunerations for our work, as we all wish for instant gratification. God puts what appear to be obstacles in our way, but these roadblocks always seem to lead us down the path that he intends for us.

It is during this season of Advent that we should reflect on and celebrate the plan God has for us and work on trusting him. This is relayed through today’s psalm, as we shall sing of God’s glory during this time of year, for we are all blessed by God in some way, shape or form. Remember to trust in God’s intentions for you during this Advent and prepare the way for the Prince of Peace.

—Keegan Rand ’19 CLAS
The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. (LK 1:35)
Early in the morning of Sept. 30, 2016, before leaving for a long weekend in New Orleans, my wife and I went to the doctor’s office to confirm what a home test had told us: We were expecting our first baby.

I remember driving up Welsh Road with nervous excitement, our suitcases flopping around in the trunk, both of us silent with anticipation. We were terrified about how our lives would change with a new member of our family. The implications of being responsible for someone else’s life scared us, overwhelmed us and, at the same time, thrilled us.

I can only imagine the fear that Mary felt when her pregnancy was announced to her by the angel Gabriel. An unmarried girl—what would people think? Surely, she didn’t expect that Joseph would stand by her and help her care for this baby. Moreover, she didn’t just have to take care of any baby, but the Son of God.

Her fear should have been paralyzing, but instead she trusts the angel's comforting words, places her fear aside and accepts her role willingly. Mary’s faith leads her to trust in Gabriel's words, “Do not be afraid,” for “nothing will be impossible for God” (Lk 1:30, 37).

These words remind me of my own experience, transitioning from fear to excitement at my daughter’s birth. No matter how daunting life’s challenges seem, the angel's comforting words remind us that God will take care of our needs, if we only have the faith to submit to his will.

—James Gallo, EdD, Director, Center for Church Management
Mary ... entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. (LK 1:39-40)
There is much emphasis on song, shouts of joy and hearing in today's readings. Zephaniah prophesies that the Lord will sing over his people. The psalm implores us to respond in song, rejoicing in God because of who he is and what he has done. The alleluia is an exclamation of praise to Emmanuel, our God with us. These readings offer a glimpse of the joyful interplay of our response to God’s glory. Even John the Baptist, not yet born, leaps for joy at the sound of a faithful one’s greeting.

May we be encouraged by today's readings to reflect on what it means to be the people of Zephaniah’s prophecy, for nothing less than pure joy will result when we know ourselves as people whom God delights in and sings over. Zephaniah declares the Gospel message that we await during Advent: God is in our midst, and has come to renew us with a love that frees and inspires joy in us. The sound of this season of Advent, of the Lord’s coming, is one of joy!

Christ, “the Lord, your God, is in your midst” (Zep 3:17), and in him our hearts rejoice. All are invited to join in this divine chorus—the Lord delighting and singing over us, and we, in turn, singing praise to him and his glorious name. May we boldly step into this invitation, declaring by our lives what it means to be part of this advent chorus as we allow ourselves to be loved and rejoiced over by God while also singing joyfully to his glory.

—Sarah Sprinkle ’19 CLAS
He raises the needy from the dust; from the ash heap he lifts up the poor, to seat them with nobles. (1 SM 2:8)
“All is gift” is one of the revelations in today’s readings.

In the book of Samuel, we see Hannah rejoicing in the Lord because he answers her prayer and grants her a son. Due to her love and gratitude for the Lord, she offers her son’s life back to God, because she realizes that her pregnancy was decided by God. Therefore, her son is a gift given by God.

Mary, too, proclaims the greatness of the Lord and sings the Lord’s praises in the Gospel of Luke. She has many months of pregnancy ahead of her, and in this time of waiting, she is acknowledging the weight of her vocation as the mother of Christ. The birth of her son will change the momentum of the world. The promise of mercy that the Lord has made will come through his son, Jesus Christ, who will save all those who follow in his footsteps.

In this time of anticipation of the birth of Christ, many people may feel as though the Lord has abandoned them in their lowest moments, when their hearts are broken and restless. But how can the Lord, who is our Father, leave his children unattended? How can he forget the promises that he has made to his children? He is the God of justice and mercy.

We shall not despair. God will not forget us, and we should not forget God. So, let us rejoice as Mary does, knowing the promises that God has made to us will be fulfilled.

—Jessica Alhanouch ’19 CLAS
His greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace. (Mi 5:3B-4A)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
We may be tired of hearing the carols, but surely, we eagerly await the celebration of God’s love for us. Maybe our minds and hearts turn to days when we were younger, looking forward to rejoicing over our gifts.

I was the third of four siblings. My dad was a New York City policeman; my mother was a crossing guard. Christmas was celebrated humbly, with two or three small gifts for each of us under the tree. Anticipation filled us as we wondered what would appear once the wrapping was ripped away!

After the gifts were opened, my father said, “Okay, time to choose one of your gifts.” That threw us off. Why would we do that? Next, he said, “Everybody, get your coats.” “Where are we going?” I asked. “To the orphanage,” he answered, “to share your joy at receiving a gift with others who have no one to give them one.”

What a lesson about the Incarnation—about embodying God’s free, unbounded and undeserved love and sharing in Jesus’ mission! Jesus is the unexpected but long-awaited revelation of God’s love for us. Each day we can celebrate the joy of knowing we are loved and not alone. We have a part in God’s grand design. We celebrate the constantly renewed opportunity to reach out, relate and share in solidarity, just as God chose to share in our reality.

Mary rushed off to share her joy with Elizabeth. So too Jesus waits for each of us to reach out in solidarity, to bear the gift of God’s love and concern for all, particularly for the least fortunate among us.

—The Rev. Arthur Purcaro, OSA, STD, Acting Vice President, Mission and Ministry
In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (LK 1:78)
One of my favorite carols is “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” At my church, we sing the chorus, “O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!” at services throughout the year with variations: “for he alone is worthy,” “he is worthy of the praises” and “in him there is no failure.” These versions lend themselves to praise and remind us to reaffirm our love and commitment to our Savior. I have always wondered about the third chorus, however. Why sing about failure in the midst of praise?

In today’s first reading, David reveals his desire to build a permanent house of worship for God. The prophet Nathan encourages him to pursue his dream. God has other plans. As a man of war, David fought many battles and shed a lot of blood. He even made a few devastating mistakes. Thus, David is not chosen to build the Temple. His son, however, is. Through David’s lineage, God keeps his promise that the house and kingdom of David will endure forever.

We can proclaim that we adore God’s gift to us, that Jesus is worthy of praise. However, we can also remind each other that in Christ, there is no failure. Despite our flaws and infirmities, God is with us wherever we go. He gives us rest from our enemies and has sent us a Savior to forgive us of sin. Because of God’s tender compassion, we do not have to wallow in the misery of past mistakes.

Forever we can sing of the goodness of the Lord. On this Christmas Eve, come, let us adore him.

—Crystal Lucky, PhD, Associate Dean, Baccalaureate Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines. (IS 25:6)
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