

Advent 2011



The People Who Walked in Darkness
Have Seen a Great Light

Waiting & Expectation

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
Who orders all things mightily,
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel



Isaiah 9:1-7

This morning, I was reading the New York Times. More unrest in the Middle East, the Euro is in trouble, the U.S. Congress has made no progress on a debt plan. All of these things added to my sense of being overwhelmed and exhausted. Life is already crazy this time of year with deadlines looming, travel arrangements to be made, extra hours at work. Meanwhile, we are blitzed by advertisements perpetually adding to the list of things that we “need” to celebrate this season.

Into this darkness Isaiah’s words speak, still as keen and true as they were thousands of years ago: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” What a full and resonant promise! It is not just the emotional anxiety and oppression of a people that is lifted. It is also the physical, social, and political load that is made light. The yoke of burden is lifted. Symbols of war are destroyed. The rod of oppression is broken.

How? A child is born. A son is given. The image here is not of a shining warrior prince, dashing in to save us. Our delivery from darkness comes to us as a humble child. A child who grows to become our “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Let us yearn together, this Advent season, for the coming of that Kingdom. As we bear with the darkness that yet remains, let us remember that we have indeed seen a great Light.

ANNA HILLAKER

Jeremiah 33:14-16

What is in a name? Recently during Sunday morning worship we were singing the name of Jesus. The song went to the heart of my emotion as I breathed out his name in song. I thought, why does the name of Jesus have such a profound effect on me? I realized that it is because of the years of history and experience in relationship with him. So much is wrapped up in his name. The prophets in the Old Testament spoke often of his coming. His life, his teachings, his crucifixion, his resurrection and his ascension into Heaven all speak into the emotion I experience when I breathe his name. It is my faith in who he is; He is the LORD, Our Righteous Saviour and he came to redeem me.

LEE BEST

Psalm 25:1-10

I remember my teenage years. Every morning I checked how perfect my hair was. I was in an all girls' school and my appearance was the most important thing. It was very shallow, but that was the way to fight my enemies, which many people call peer pressure or self-consciousness.

Now I am older but I keep asking myself. What should I wear? How do I look? How to deal with problems at work? What's next? Computer, phone, GPS... I turn to technology and strive to find a way to overcome the fear of being lost.

In our church, in 2011, we still have an interesting tool; the overhead projector (OHP). In our high tech world, OHP is an antique. It is very un-cool! But can you see something else? It reminds me of the sign on an antique shop - "I like something defective or imperfect." Can you deliberately make yourself vulnerable?

Lord, we pray and wait for your coming. Shine your light on the places of injustice or simply on our own minds full of fear. Show us your little path which helps us to grow. Let us fully depend on you and give us courage to live as your children.

YUMIKO KING

Genesis 15:1-6

Broken dreams. Shattered hopes. Crushed longings. We've all had them. We've all been in the place where some dearly desired outcome is lost. The job never comes, the spouse never materializes, the life-purpose never seems to quite crystallize. For Abram it is the longing for a son.

Then, the man of broken dreams is met by God in a dream. "I am your strength, Abram, your very great reward." Those who have faced the desolation of their hopes can resonate with Abram's response: "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I am childless?" Abram wonders what sort of reward God could possibly provide, in the light of his longing. God sometime does not seem like enough. Yet God repeats that all shall be well, and Abram believes.

But Abram still does not receive the thing promised! For another 25 years, Abram waits, his longing being carefully cultivated by a very-present God. His faith, credited as righteousness in that moment of belief, had to be aged until it is was as rich and strong as good wine. It was not Abram's lack of faith that led to the delay, but the careful craftsmanship of the divine vintner.

Will you offer up the gift of your unfulfilled longing? Will you allow God to cultivate the broken dreams and the failed hopes? God will not waste one drop of that precious desire, but will turn it into a richer legacy than you can now imagine. Abram's ultimate offspring was Christ himself, and his descendants are all the nations who believe in him. I can't wait to see what yours will be!

BETHANY SOLLEREDER

1 Samuel 1:1-11

During my fifth Christmas, my mother went overboard with her gift buying. As she observed the bevy of gifts, the wrapping job seemed daunting, so on Christmas Eve, my parents carefully set out the toys under and around the tree, dozens and dozens of colorful toys sprawling across the room. They imagined us running from toy to toy in surprised exclamation, scarcely able to take in the bounty, joyfully anticipating all the fun that lay ahead of us. The next morning they waited at the bottom of the stairs with the camera, practically in as much anticipation as us kids. I ran down the stairs, stopped, gasped...and burst into tears! "They're not wrapped!" I wailed.

Hannah's story is one of intense yearning for a gift. Not only does Hannah long with her whole body and soul, but she continually faces both ridicule and dismissal of her longings; yet, she seeks and vows and prays without losing fervor, because she knows the glorious possibilities. My own experience of real longing has only seemed to fade since those early Christmases of surprise and wonder. Why is my anticipation so dull, my expectation so low? Do I approach Christ like the Gift already unwrapped, as if I have seen all there is of His Greatness, as if nothing is left of this glorious Saviour's coming and abiding that can surprise me, bowling me over with "inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Pet 1:8)? Or, on the contrary, will I follow Hannah and faithfully fulfill my vows to the Lord (Ps. 50:14; 56:12; 61:8) of thanksgiving and sacrifice, as I expectantly look to Him as the one Source of all good things, whose hand withholds no good gift from His beloved child? This year, may Advent be a time to renew our passionate longings and seek to unwrap more of our Saviour. Let's wholeheartedly rip into the abundance of presents awaiting us!

MEGAN JENKINS

Luke 1:18-25

Waiting, hoping, praying, crying
Month after month, year after year
Aching and empty

Aging, resigned to my state
but no easier to bear the pain,
the questioning looks, the joy of friends
the laughter of children, the sighs of sleeping babies

And now, with Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel before me
I am amazed

CLARE VAN MAARSVEEN

Psalm 13

David wrestling with his thoughts, sorrow in his heart, and carrying a ton of trouble with a stomach full of pain...the mind-body connection evident even for the psalmist!

Waiting and ruminating, ruminating, ruminating...

Racing minds rational by daylight, but ambushed in dark times by rigid bodies and emotions grown large – grief, anger, disappointment, isolation, brokenheartedness. How long until the morning? When will daylight come? Where is the peaceful oblivion of sleep? Or maybe it is all just too much? Lord, have you forgotten me?

Waiting and longing...

When will I find the one I will love? When will I feel healthy again? When will this conflict be over? And Lord, will I ever have a job, or a place of my own to call “home”?

My sense of hopelessness and despair creates disconnection with friends. Even God himself seems to have turned his face from me and become silent.

Waiting and trusting...

I know that there will be a time when this moment has passed. Looking back I will see how my emotions have affected my experience of time – speeding it up or slowing it down. Looking back I will see and understand the ways that God has always been there, even at the times when I have felt completely alone and without hope.

Waiting and hoping...even rejoicing!

The psalmist passes quickly from the depths of despair and darkness to the heights of confidence and joy. I remember all the times when God has been good to me, the ways in which his love has never failed. Soon, I too will sing a confident new song. I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me in the past. I know that he will not forget me now!

Repentance & Preparation

O come, O come thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient time didst give the law
In cloud and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, O Rod of Jesse free,
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel



Isaiah 11:1-10

As I am writing this, there are people living in tents at the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery with signs saying, “this is what democracy looks like” or “if you think greed is bad, wait until you hear about capitalism.” They have been there for 23 days and counting, trying to get justice.

It is known that BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada by far and the highest child poverty rate for eight years running. Living in poverty means that you are more likely to live in cold, damp, or unsafe housing.

We are still identified by our layers of exclusion. I often wonder if there will be a time where all people will be on equal footing, regardless of sexual orientation, social economic, ability/ disability, race, etc. I like to believe so, but in reality, no. I was telling a friend that I feel like I live in an uncomfortable place – always questioning about injustice. She was affirming that it is a good feeling ... to live uncomfortably.

Because the Kingdom is a better place to be.

No wonder Christmas is a magical time for me. Jesus is the new branch who is filled with justice, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. Jesus could teach others to do the same. We are getting ready for Him. The One who brings a whole new world... who recreates the old Paradise for all of us. When He is finished, when He is done with us, He has created in us a new innocence, a new peace, a new harmony.

It is because of Him; He gives me hope.

KAREN LAI

Malachi 3:1-4

My dad and I love Handel's *Messiah*. As I read this passage, I hear in my head the beautiful combination of the different voice parts in a particular section of *Messiah*. That music is so much a part of my Advent/Christmas experience that it's become a signal of the season for me. Just as I prepare in other ways for the season by making or buying gifts and decorating a tree, I pull out my 4-disc set of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performing Handel's *Messiah*. On one level, all of these things are part of what Christmastime *is* for me—they are what I do, what it looks like and sounds like.

Advent is about more than that, though, so I want to take the time each year to prepare on another level. The kind of preparation referred to in this passage needs to be just as much a part of what *I do* as me pulling out Handel's *Messiah*. The suggested themes of judgment and purification in the passage may not seem very fitting with the “holiday spirit”. And for many of us, this more important, quieter preparation is easy to lose sight of in the midst of the busyness of Christmastime.

However, I think this passage can be an encouragement to us. The message is this: like a refiner's fire or fuller's soap, God has work to do on us. God wants to refine us, cleanse us, and prepare us for his purposes. This is what Advent is about for the faithful.

LAUREN LAUTZENHISER

Isaiah 61:1-4

One of the historical purposes for Advent is that in waiting for the Christ-child to come, we recognize that we cannot save ourselves. Only the One on whom the Spirit of God fully rests is able to bring healing, freedom, comfort, and gladness. I love hearing people's stories of their initial encounters with God's grace, and we should never tire of telling them. However wisdom teaches us regularly not to become stuck on our most recent stepping-stone of God's grace.

With Advent coming yearly, we are reminded that we haven't reached completion. Sometimes we remain stuck because our emotions are drained and we've forgotten our last genuine taste of joy. We find it hard to move forward because our thoughts are scattered, lacking clear purpose. Our activities seem meaningless because our spirits are fainting. It is for us that the waiting of Advent is a life-giving opportunity, because we have accepted that our strength and even our clever psychological insights are not enough.

Waiting or contemplative prayer is not an escape from reality where we are blissfully engaged on some ethereal plane. Rather it is a safe environment to confront our affliction, brokenness, and captivity. In silently waiting for God, we become aware of where we lack trust and gratitude. Those moments become divine transactions where we receive hope instead of doubt, and praise replaces mourning. With renewed insight and joy we are capable of seeing the next step to help mend our shattered world. God's kingdom can only be built by those who have known with their entire being God's ongoing work of grace. Activity alternates with receptive surrender to the Christ who has the power to make all things new.

CAROLYN COUILLARD

DECEMBER 7

Colossians 3:1-4



ANNE McMILLAN

Mark 1:1-8

Water plays a role in almost every religion and belief system. So it's not a totally new event in the history of the Israeli people, when a man appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life change. Indeed, prior to these events, the ritualistic use of water for cleansing and maintaining a state of purity was a familiar practice in the Judaic tradition.

But cleansing is only one characteristic of water. Water brings forth and sustains life. Where there is a lack of water, death is sure to follow. Water is also powerful. It has the ability to destroy as well as sustain life, and we can't always contain the powerful forces associated with water.

You could say that we are somewhat at the mercy of water, although we may not be aware of that fact. Just as we are at the mercy of a loving God, our very breath is a gift from Him.

This Christmas season, let us be drawn into the baptism of forgiveness and new life that is offered to us, as we confess our sins, shed our seasonal anxieties, and be wonderfully emerged, cleansed, and washed in His forgiveness, peace and love. This is a gift to us all, coming from the source of all love, and made possible through His Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

GEORGE TKACHENKO

Exodus 13:17-22

When the people left Egypt, God lead them not the shorter way, but the longer way, through the desert. For the Israelites, the desert was a place of preparation – a place for transformation and growing faith. The desert may be a “dry and weary land” (Ps. 63), but in our Christian faith the desert plays a prominent role. Both before the birth of Christ and afterwards, communities and individuals immigrated to the desert seeking spiritual purity in their lives. Isaiah’s prophecy in Chapter 40 declares that the revelation of the glory of the Lord would be preceded by, “A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” John the Baptist fulfills this prophecy when he appeared in the wilderness, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:2-4). It was also the place where Jesus was lead to be tempted. The desert is a place of preparation.

We live in a world that predominantly prefers the shorter way, and certainly does not revel in the desert; yet that is precisely where God called the Israelites, and at times, will certainly call us. Without the purification of the longer route through the desert, we will not be prepared for the battles we must face, neither will we know how to follow the cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night. But once we have seen the Great Light and determinedly set our feet to follow wherever it leads, we receive the promise of vs. 22: “Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” The Light, which has come into the world, will always precede us.

DAVID JENKINS

2 Peter 3:8-14

“Always wear clean underwear in case you get into an accident.”

To me biblical injunctions to ‘be good because Jesus is coming back when you least expect it’ sound an awful lot like this maternal saying. Life could be going merrily along when suddenly out of nowhere...the clouds part, Jesus flies right at you, snatching you from your home and dragging you to heaven. So be ready! The worst thing that could happen is that Jesus would come back, see the traces of what you have done and then He and your mother will be embarrassed.

There is more to it than that. The world is broken, full of wounded people, suffering, systemic injustice and evil. We have been betrayed by those we love; we watch as friends are mired in depression and addiction. We are powerless against the pain and injustice. We cry out, “How long O Lord?”

My prayer this Advent is that as we await the Lord’s coming, we long for it. The Jesus who saved us by his death and resurrection is not coming back to catch us in the act; rather he comes to ‘bring a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.’ He comes to take all our brokenness and betrayal and bring healing and new life. In our waiting, we also work to bring his renewal to our neighbourhoods and our world. Ours is an active waiting. The Kingdom is not yet, but it is now! Come King Jesus!

JAMES MATICHUK

Joy

O Come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer,
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel



TAIYA SCHOEBER

Psalm 126

Lord, we need your help again; we are like dry creek-beds in need of rain. We have worked with sweat and tears; let us reap the rewards with celebration. Let those who labored with heavy hearts, expecting nothing but despair, come home with pride renewed, celebrating unimaginable success (paraphrase of Psalm 26 from laughingbird.net).

I wonder if we are opened to encounter joy more acutely through deeply experiencing sadness, pain, or desolation. Just as gratefulness for health emerges out of illness, relief of quenched thirst is experienced when feeling parched; exuberance of freedom is celebrated when one has been bound.

Could it be that during those times of sorrow and heaviness God desires to draw us closer? And so we choose to engage with the One who desires to accompany us in all of life or to navigate alone, in self-imposed exile.

What might God's presence in our desperation look like? Accompaniment, but ultimately transformation in us. I wonder if part of this transformation is opening us to the possibility of something unanticipated. A glimmer of this-doesn't-make-sense expectancy in the dismal. The God-is-with-me hope in despair. Perhaps a subtle shimmer in our peripheral vision that turns our heads with the question 'might this be joy?' A singing-bubbling-up-in-us kind of joy in the presence of sadness. A laughter-against-all odds kind of joy erupting out of sorrow. The sort of thing that evokes a response that radiates "I can't help but celebrate You!" and "this is God's work".

In this season of waiting, may you choose to engage with God in whatever this day holds for you. Come, Lord Jesus, come. "We need your help again; we are like dry creek-beds in need of rain."

KAREN WEBBER

Zephaniah 3:14-20

My Christmas Fatigue, like the mall Santas, arrived not long after Halloween. We're starting into another Christmas season, and I'm already thinking, "How am I going to conjure up the feelings of joy I'm supposed to have at Christmas, when really, we just finished doing this 10 months ago, and it's not as if I haven't heard the story before – how do I make myself feel joyful?"

So I groaned when I saw that my assigned passage for the Advent Devotions fell under the subject heading of "Joy".

But as I read the passage, I realized that, in this passage about Joy, God isn't telling his people to be joyful. He's telling them "Do not be afraid".

In the story of Christ's birth "Do not be afraid" shows up a lot. Apparently we need to hear these words over and over. It reminds me of the line in the old Christmas Pageant, when the shepherds cower in fear before the angel, and the angel asks, "What part of 'fear not' don't you understand?"

God doesn't say "Be joyful" in this passage. It's God who is doing all the rejoicing - he's going to exult over us with "loud singing as on a day of festival". I love that thought, not angelic choirs with serene choruses, it's going to be LOUD!

God is telling us "Now you don't have to be afraid anymore. Just do that one thing for me – don't be afraid." I don't even need to be afraid of not feeling joyful enough.

Maybe Fear Not is the flip side of Joy. And maybe when we are not afraid, we make a space for joy to happen.

SUSAN FERGUSON

John 1:1-4



DOE BENDER

Psalm 36:5-9

This passage rejoices in God's unfailing love, faithfulness, righteousness and justice. Since we were made in His image, we too have these elements within us, however imperfect and damaged we now are.

It is such a joy to be in a position to trust and believe that we have a protector, a place of refuge where we will feast on abundance and drink from a river of delights.

Joy is defined as deep and abiding, that which endures whereas happiness is considered a momentary pleasure and something of a more fleeting nature.

The way of joy can be achieved by willful commitment or choice – joy is an act of praise and an effective antidote for depression and anxiety. Remember Paul's journey through life and his instruction to be "content in all things". Many times through his travels things were stressful and unpleasant, at times downright dangerous. Never did he loosen his grip on the abundance of joy he held tight to. That was his place of refuge; the difficulties in this earthly existence could not distract him from the greater joy of that yet to come when his earthly mission was completed.

The joy of a Christian is based on relationship to God – who He is, not who I am or what's going on in my own life. Things can be crashing down about me, but I can refuse to let go of the joy in my spirit. Recounting blessings in the times of troubles renews one's faith and trust in who God is and what He has done. It is in our times of trials in which we can truly shine. We can emerge from the furnace of life truly refined and pure as gold.

ANNE MCMILLAN

Psalm 30

Waiting,
Flawed and impatient
Digging myself deeper and deeper graves
Fooling myself more and more
About my strength, my direction

Waiting...
Reconnecting with your humility
And your hugeness
Awed by your embodiment of smallness and vulnerability
In your arrival on earth

Waiting...
Watching for possibility
Reining in my own independence
Torn between my “greatness” and my “nothingness”
I ignore your anger and frustration
I pretend they don’t exist

Waiting...
I put my prideful self before you
Believing I am your favourite
Hiding in my own “power”

Waiting...
You wait patiently for me to get it
You welcome me back into relationship
Whenever I do truly search for you
You bring forth your power in a newborn
And our world is changed
I am changed and I grow
I celebrate
But I am so very flawed
That I keep repeating this cycle.

And I am loved
And forgiven
As you watch and care for me
Waiting...

Isaiah 60:1-3

The warmth of the sun is hard to remember this time of year. It is not just the distance from winter to summer, but also from melancholia to contentment. Diminishing daylight hours feed the illusion of an encroaching darkness. It is a season when Isaiah's poetic picture of the coming light resonates deeply. The economically phrased passage bursts with the full gospel story, the gospel that has already happened and has yet to come. First (and the order is important), we are shown God's vocation: to turn the light of his face towards his people, rescuing them from the oppressive darkness. Second, we are shown our own vocation as his people: to absorb God's light into our hearts while also reflecting it outward, drawing in those who dwell in the dark around us.

When the literal and metaphorical darkness of the winter season weighs heavy, remember that it is only for a short time. Our ultimate destiny lies in this vision of light felt and light expressed, as a tangible, physical presence of God's goodness. This is the vision we move towards. Every dark day that passes means we have walked that much closer to Isaiah's picture. If you are reading this book, chances are you have already felt that glimmer of light, if only for a moment. But one day, God's presence will not be a delicate, mysterious inkling, but a constant physical presence. In that age, we will truly know the warmth of the Son.

MELODIE STOREY

Luke 1:67-79

In reading Zachariah's prophecy, what moved me most were the words "...through the heartfelt mercies of God, God's sunrise will break in upon us", breaking on those sitting in the darkness.

I had an image with dark grey rocks and inky ice-cold shadows of a predawn desert. The night star-studded sky brought no warmth. Gradually the eastern horizon began to change into dawning light, revealing silhouettes of people, individuals crouched on the rocks, between boulders—cold, despondent. The sky began to reveal hints of orange, yellow gold, and red, getting brighter and then, suddenly, the sun broke over the crest of the hills!

By the tender mercies of God, he causes the sun to bring light, warmth and hope. Come, let us embrace the hope of this new day, welcoming the warmth. Let us rise up and follow Him who leads us "down the paths of peace".

Promises of hope, warmth, forgiveness, tender mercies, walking into the light...

ANN TKACHENKO

Incarnation

O come, Desire of nations bind,
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!



Matthew 1:1-17

My brother recently got his first tattoo. You could say he's the tattoo type, but I'm not so sure. This tattoo wasn't born in rebellion or with a buddy in drunken solidarity. It was born with the desire to honour a change in our family's story this year: the death of our cousin Ian. The tattoo wraps around his self-described "chicken leg." It is a vivid wakeboard scene that remembers Ian as he lived. It also says of my brother's story, "I'll never be the same."

The beginning of the New Testament begins with a family remembering of sorts. The gospel opens with a genealogy where names of women and men are tattooed into the story of God's family. These names, many of which we know nothing about, get our attention and prepare us for a change in this family story.

We do a lot of things to remember people. We name them, we list them in our family trees, we hang pictures up to remember them, we tattoo a part of their story on our skin. The stories of those who have gone before us matter – they matter to the story of the Saviour. Jesus emerges from this list of names leaving no story unnoticed or unredeemed.

At the beginning of this gospel a new narrative is underway. And while this list is of people who have died, the story is all about how we'll live.

BOBBI SALKELD

Luke 1:26-38



When I look at The 'Pieta' it breaks my heart. I look upon a young mother holding her dead child. What pain does her serene face conceal? She holds out her left hand as if to signify that she submits to the events that the Strangers foretold.

Just when her mind was full of wedding bliss a stranger appears. The angel Gabriel tells her that God has chosen her to conceive and bear a son. She asks how this can be as she is a virgin. Despite what this will cost her socially as an unwed mother, she consents. She humbly says, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

So as it was foretold, the Holy Spirit moves and Mary conceives a child. The events of her pregnancy and delivery are not recorded. As a mother myself I can imagine. There would have been physical changes that would cause her anxiety and discomfort to say the least. Despite what this will cost her physically, she submits to the will of God.

Postpartum, when there are many other physical discomforts happening, Mary meets another stranger. Simeon at last meets his Salvation, "For my eyes have seen my salvation." Does this affirm in Mary the uniqueness of her child? Then Simeon turns to her and says, "And a sword will pierce your soul." The 'Pieta' becomes "The Girl with the Sword in her Soul." Her face conceals the pain in her heart and soul. Mary's pain is the cost of my salvation. When I look at The 'Pieta' it breaks my heart.

Luke 1:39-45



How have you responded to the exciting news of Mary's pregnancy?

Perhaps this photo in which the exciting news of Mary's pregnancy is delivered to Elizabeth has created a joyful smile!

Elizabeth's response to Mary's visit is a beautiful combination of humility and joy.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

How do we respond when we too are invited to be part of a grand plan, the beautiful story of salvation, the great light for all the world to see?

Come Lord, and o- pen in us, the gates of your king- dom.

This Taizé mediation could be a helpful tool for reflecting on how we can respond to our invitation to take part in the story of the incarnation.

Luke 1:46-55

Mary's Song is one of the most magnificent passages in the Bible. The song is wonderful even though Mary herself elicits a variety of responses. She is shunned and forgotten by some, many do not know what to make of her and are wary, still others seem almost obsessed by her. Be that as it may, all these different perspectives could do with re-discovering Mary's words to God and therefore to us today.

Mary's song, the Magnificat, is known as the first hymn of the Gospels and therefore of the faith and Christ Church. It is a song of Mary's openness; it is a song for us to re-enact, repeat and re-live. It is a song of love, of faith, and trust. The faithfulness and fealty that Mary would express in the song, would be a faith that would come back to challenge her, to hurt and to harm her in ways that we cannot begin to imagine.

Much is rightly made of Mary's love and glorifying of God. Much is also made of her youth, innocence, and vulnerability. An overly sentimental version of Mary does a disservice to God, Gabriel and Mary herself. God knew the strength and vibrancy of the one he chose. Gabriel was not on a fool's errand. Gabriel was meeting the most significant woman in the Christian faith. Mary was not a surrogate body for some cosmic incarnational experiment. The very essence of God is united with the very essence of Mary, and from her Jesus is born. May we echo with Mary her words in verse 46: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in my Saviour." May we seek to experience the promise and presence of the living Christ as we anticipate his birth this Advent season.

JEREMY BELL

John 1:9-18

After passing forty, I have been joking about the loss of energy or loss of hair as simply starting to shed the things not needed for immortality. It is serious business, however. As we pass through time, we drop more and more ties to this world, like Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* shedding his dragon skin. Sometimes we laugh at the layers peeling off, like having to hold fine print at arm's length to read it. Other cuts are deeper, much deeper, like the loss of a loved one, or of memory, or mobility. And we wonder how we will bear to shed so much.

Advent sees this process miraculously reverse. What must it have meant for the Word to become flesh, God to become human, so finite and particular and limited? To become as specific as you and I, from a certain neighbourhood, speaking with a certain accent, with family traits people would identify. Maybe a sense of humour some didn't get, a relative people spoke about in only in hushed tones, a favourite colour or an allergy to milk. Layer upon layer of human details until he was like us, the Word clothed in flesh.

And while we can only imagine some of these details now, we can also trust that they aren't lost. The humanity the Word promises to put on at Advent promises to save ours. He meets us in all that we lose along the way, and takes us with him to add it back.

KEVIN BEST

Matthew 1:18-23

JOY (TO THE WORLD)

Through the silence
Through the darkness
Through the doubting
Through the fear

*Joy to the world
Heaven is with us
Hear the angels sing
Joy to the world*

Love was watching
Love was waiting
Through the heartache
Through the tears

*Joy to the world
A new day is dawning
Lift up your head
Joy to the world*

An angel has promised Mary a baby
See, the heart of God is breaking open

Let every heart
Let every heart
Let every heart
Prepare him room

*Joy to the world
Heaven is with us
Hear the angels sing
Joy to the world*

*Joy to the world
Heaven is with us
Don't be afraid
Lift up your head
A Saviour is born
Joy to the world*

*Joy to the world
A new day is dawning
Lift up your head
Joy to the world*

In the alleys
In the shelters
In the shadows
He is here

In our families
In our stories
In our ordinary lives
He is here

Nowhere on earth His love cannot find you
Nowhere on earth His light won't shine

BEV WILLMS BEST

Download the song at <http://bit.ly/s6LLLH>

Luke 2:1-7



Luke 2:8-21

That night
That ordinary, unremarkable night,
Shepherds trudge along in wretched tedium
Again

A baby is born
Shattering earth's silent centripetal passage
With the incarnate word.

Heaven's jubilation cannot be contained.
It erupts,
Unbidden,
On unsuspecting shepherds,
Overwhelmed by the presence of angels;
Who proclaim this message
Of Peace.

The skies burst open, awash with the luminous splendor of angels
Delighting in this most preposterous of gifts.
Their exultant chorus resounds the laughter of God,
Brimming over and
Showering the earth
With Joy.

How desolate then, the skies appear at the moment of his severance,
Engulfed in the deathly silence of mourning
Earth arrested once more
By a costly expenditure
Of Love.

How can it be,
That this lavish outpouring of heaven's glory
Is squandered

On a handful of ignominious shepherds,
Who eagerly receive it.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God.

MAGGIE MARTENS



AGATHA MILLEY



CLARE VAN MAARSVEEN
COVER ART: ZOE ASHER



KITSILANO CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY