



*And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...
who has scattered the proud
in the thoughts of their hearts.
who has brought down the powerful
from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
who has filled the hungry with good things.
- Luke 1:46-53*

Be Still and Go

Meditations for the Movement

Advent 2018

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS AT RIVERSIDE

SINGING MARY'S SONG

Sunday, December 2 | First Sunday of Advent
Worship with Pastor Amy Butler, preaching | 10:45 am | Nave

Sunday, December 9 | Second Sunday of Advent
Worship and Children's Pageant | 10:45 am | Nave
Service of Hope & Consolation | 2:00 pm | Christ Chapel

Sunday, December 16 | Third Sunday of Advent
Worship with Pastor Amy Butler, preaching | 10:45 am | Nave
Candlelight Carol Festival | 4:00 pm | Nave

Sunday, December 23 | Fourth Sunday of Advent
Worship with Pastor Amy Butler, preaching | 10:45 am | Nave

A SHOOT, A SHOUT, A SHEPHERD

Advent at Space for Grace

Wednesday, December 5
Rev. Jim Keat, preaching | 7:00 pm | Assembly Hall

Wednesday, December 12
Minister Derrick Jordan, preaching | 7:00 pm | Assembly Hall

Wednesday, December 19
Minister Christian Peele, preaching | 7:00 pm | Assembly Hall

CHRISTMAS EVE

Monday, December 24
Service for Children & Families | 4:00 pm | Nave
Service of Lessons & Carols | 8:00 pm | Nave

WATCHNIGHT

Monday, December 31
Worship with Rev. Michael Livingston, preaching | 11:00 pm | Nave

THE MAGNIFICAT PROJECT

Sunday, December 2 - Thursday, January 3
Visit the Cloister Lounge to see artistic and literary interpretations of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and one of the oldest Christian hymns, the Magnificat (Mary's Song).

Welcome to Be Still and Go: Advent 2018

The first chapter of the first book of the Bible is one that you are probably familiar with. It starts with the classic, “In the beginning” and continues on, poetically depicting God creating everything: And God said, “Let there be a thing,” and there was a thing. God looked at the thing and said, “It is good.”

God continues this rhythm until everything is created, rocks and trees and skies and seas and lions and tigers and bears, oh my. Life is bursting forth from God’s very being. In fact, I’m pretty sure this is one of the best images of God – God sees something formless and void and God glides in to create life. This is who God is.

But then after six days of God being God, creating beauty within the chaos and breathing life into the formless and void, God does something surprising and seemingly out of character. God stops, God takes a day off, God rests. After six days of “go” God decides to “be still.” God goes from work, work, work, work, work to the sound of silence.

*Creating the world is what we expect from God, but God resting?
That’s a miracle.*

And the truth is, we need both. That word “and” is intentional – Be still and go. It’s not an option, even though we tend to live as if it is. In order to go, in order to do all the things you are called to do, to bring life to the formless and void around you, you need moments to be still.

And so that’s what this devotional is – Be Still and Go: Meditations for the Movement. Throughout the season of Advent these daily readings will invite you to live into the both/and of Be Still and Go, filling you up so that you can continue to pour out life and justice and creativity and beauty in the world around you.

So whether you read this devotional first thing in the morning, on a break in the middle of the day, or each night before bed, the invitation is the same: Be Still. And go.

The First Week of Advent

listen online at trcnyc.org/BeStillAndGo

Sunday, December 2

Luke 21:25-28

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

These are apocalyptic texts, passages in scripture that speak to the end of the world as we know it. These texts were composed by people living in dire straits, circumstance in which the world around them seemed to be falling apart and there was nothing to do except think about what would happen when it was all over once and for all.

I can look at the distress among nations and the roaring of the sea and the waves and summon the hope to do exactly what Jesus told us to do: “stand up raise your heads...because your redemption is drawing near.” A new world is being born and we can find hope in being the midwives to usher it in. All the pain, all the rending, all the work, never giving up on the coming of a new world - this is where we find the hope this first week of Advent.

-Pastor Amy

Reflect & Respond

What do you feel or notice when you read these apocalyptic words of Jesus from Luke 21?

When you look at the world around you, where do you see redemption drawing near?

Monday, December 3

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Advent is the season of watching and waiting. But I don't believe that we're waiting for God to show up — spoiler alert, God is always and already here — but we are waiting for God to be born again in us in new ways so that justice and righteousness can spring up all around us, in us, and in spite of us.

Because this branch is not some person from once upon a time or a galaxy far, far away. This branch is you and me. We are the branches for justice and righteousness. When you march in a protest, you are a righteous branch springing up. When you call your congress person to advocate for children who are separated from their families, you are a righteous branch springing up. When you pray with your feet and your vote, you are a righteous branch springing up.

-Rev. Jim Keat

Reflect & Respond

Where do you see justice and righteousness springing up in our world?

In your own words, what does it mean to be a "righteous branch"?

Tuesday, December 4

Luke 1:50-52

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God’s servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is God’s name.
God’s mercy is for those who fear God
from generation to generation.
God has shown strength with God’s arm;
God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
God has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
God has helped God’s servant Israel,
in remembrance of God’s mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to God’s descendants forever.”

It’s amazing to me that Christianity with such direct words as this has still largely been able to confuse capitalism, Western imperialism, the world of white privilege, however you want to call it, with the gospel. It’s ignoring what’s spoken in plain sight.

-Fr. Richard Rohr

Reflect & Respond

What do you feel when you hear these words of Mary’s song?

In your own words, what does Mary’s song speak “in plain sight”?

Wednesday, December 5

Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.”

Advent is the season of anticipation. The word Advent literally means “arrival” and during these four weeks leading up to Christmas we are waiting for the arrival of the Prince of Peace. Advent marks the beginning of the Christian calendar and it is a time when we reflect on the brokenness around us and the promised coming of the reign of God. It strikes me that there is a particular wisdom in the fact that our year does not begin with an event. It does not begin with the birth of the one who is supposed to heal our world. It begins in stillness, in waiting.

Waiting is not a substitute for doing. We don’t say, “Instead of going to the polls on election day, I’ll just sit still for 20 minutes.” Prayer alone will not fill a hungry stomach. And yet, in a near mystical way, science has shown that it is how we kit ourselves back together from the battering of life. Be still and go. Meditate for the movement.

Advent isn’t a passive time we have to get through before the real works begins. It is the work of birthing a new heaven and a new earth.

In Advent we repair our world by sitting and waiting and praying, Come, Lord Jesus, Come.”

-Rev. Rachel Johnson

Reflect & Respond

In your own words, how would you define Advent?

Take a minute to stop and breathe, to be still. What do you notice?.

Thursday, December 6

Luke 21:34-36

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Sometimes we say that Advent is about waiting. But that implies that we're just sitting around waiting for the time to pass until the birth of the Christ child. But Advent isn't passive. Lived well, Advent is the time when we are the most active, the most alert, the most awake, the most in tune with the world because we are expecting God to break through into our lives.

I believe that God longs to break into each of our well-protected lives, to teach us about hope, love, joy, and peace, right now. If anything, Advent is the time when we must wake up to live in the present, to live the life that God has given us right now, to refuse to live yesterday over and over, to resist the temptation to save our best selves for tomorrow, to not put off living the kind of life we were meant to live today. There's not time for that, no matter how much time is left.

-Rev. Cameron Trimble

Reflect & Respond

In your own words, how does Luke's invitation to “be on guard” connect with the season of Advent?

What does it mean for you to live in the present and refuse to live yesterday over and over?

Friday, December 7

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

This passage reminds me that there is a great cloud of witnesses around us, that there is great love to be had if we only know where to look. I see that the writer begins with gratitude, with thankfulness, looking at his brothers, sisters, and siblings and saying, "I can't imagine my life without you. I can't imagine being a church without you. I can't imagine doing this work without you."

The writer here is encouraging us to begin with thanks, we thank God for each other. "How can we thank God enough for you for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?"

-Kevin Garcia

Reflect & Respond

Who are the people in your life who you are giving thanks for?

Who are the people that you can encourage? Call or text them today.

Saturday, December 8

Luke 1:52-55

“God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
God has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
God has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of God’s mercy,
according to the promise God made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to God’s descendants forever.”

After saying a risky yes to a divinely unorthodox pregnancy, Mary boldly declares a vision of God’s reign in which God throws “down the powerful from their thrones, and lifts up the lowly;” and “has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” A prophetic, truth-telling disciple, Mary announces a new order, in which the Creator of Heaven and Earth favors her lowly estate, while scattering the proud in their hearts.

Mary’s vision of power topples the usual visions of power as physical strength, economic wealth, intellectual superiority, or military dominance. In her vision, the poor, the hungry, the lowly—they are the chosen ones, the truly blessed, the friends of God.

And so, let us sit with Mary in prayer for a moment and allow her vision, her spirit, and her faith touch and inspire our own.

-Rev. Lynn Casteel Harper

Reflect & Respond

How is Mary’s song inspiring you?

What song do you think Mary would sing today?

The Second Week of Advent

listen online at trcnyc.org/BeStillAndGo

Sunday, December 9

Luke 1:26-35

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."

I came to see the stories of the virgin birth less as facts to be debated in a literal sense and more as signs or mysteries to be pondered in a literary sense. Their greatest value isn't in proving something but in meaning something. And what could that meaning be?

May we dare to side with Mary who dares to believe that peace can come not by taking life but by giving birth.

-Brian McLaren

Reflect & Respond

In your opinion, what is the meaning of the virgin birth?

What does it look like for peace to come into our world today?

Monday, December 10

Malachi 3:1-4

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

I used to believe the refiner's fire was meant to add suffering so we are purified by pain. But that paints a very masochistic view of God. If God is holy and just and loving, God's fire illuminates so that we can draw together to relieve suffering of one another. Do not fear the refiner's fire. It lights truth and justice and a path forward that includes those who suffer those among us.

Prepare yourselves. He who comes will not be what we expect. It will not be the voices of those we are used to hearing from platforms and spotlights. It will be the surprising stories from those we have not heard before, refining us by opening our eyes, driving us to repentance, and then drawing us to a larger version of being human in our beautifully diverse world.

-Cindy Wang Brandt

Reflect & Respond

What messages have you been told about the refiner's fire?

How has your understanding of this metaphor evolved?

Tuesday, December 11

Luke 1:76-79

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

We are a people desperately in need of good news. In this land, life expectancies are more accurately predicted by one's zip code than their genetic code. In this land, our justice system has criminalized poverty as thousands sit in jails, not because they've been convicted of a crime, but simply because they could not afford bail. In this land, many who work tirelessly to provide for their families are still denied a living wage. In this land, we too wait on good news!

But we have a promise that a Redeemer is on the way. As God is already at work in us, let's expect the impossible! Whenever the world seems left in a state of hopeless despair, as prophetic witnesses to the coming of good news, let us serve as the voices of ones crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

-Rev. Kevin VanHook

Reflect & Respond

What does it mean for your feet to be guided “into the way of peace”?

What is the good news that you are waiting for? What is the good news that you can help bring to the world around you?

Wednesday, December 12

Luke 1:46-55

Mary responded, “Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior! For God took notice of his lowly servant girl, and now generation after generation forever shall call me blest of God. For God, the mighty Holy One, has done great things to me. God’s mercy goes on from generation to generation, to all who reverence God.

“How powerful is God’s mighty arm! How God scatters the proud and haughty ones! God has torn princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. God has satisfied the hungry hearts and sent the rich away with empty hands. And how God has helped his servant Israel! God has not forgotten his promise to be merciful. For God promised our fathers—Abraham and his children—to be merciful to them forever.”

The Magnificat is no gentle hymn, however often it’s been sung by choir boys at evensong. It’s a fiery manifesto, declaring not only the birth of a baby, but the birth of a whole new world order. And the one proclaiming it is not one meek and mild but a mighty prophet.

-Rev. Daniel Brereton

Reflect & Respond

Where do you see justice and righteousness springing up in our world?

In your own words, what does it mean to be a “righteous branch”?

Thursday, December 13

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul writes these words to his close friends at Philippi, memories of their time together are what sustain him...their shared work of the gospel.

This Advent, you and I are making different memories. Yes, the world seems a little colder and people are angry and confused and tired. Our lives have changed as well. We've lost some of our innocence, and our belief that justice and truth will prevail has taken a beating. Even our memories are tinged with sadness. We look back and remember the people who no longer gather with us around the tree at Christmas. We search for the certainty we once had about our purpose and place in the world. We long for a simpler, sweeter time.

And that is what Advent reminds us of, a time deeper than our time. A time beyond time. We remember "a people who walked in darkness, all those who were living in a land of deep darkness." It was on them and on us that a great light has shined. Into a time of anger and loss and fear, a child was born. A child that was love and hope and light. And we remember his name – Emmanuel - God is with us.

-Rev. Ellen Robison

Reflect & Respond

As you look back on your year, what are the memories that will sustain you, even in the darkest of times?

What memories will you create in the upcoming year to remind you that God is with us?

Friday, December 14

Luke 3:3-6

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

When God speaks and God’s word comes to John the Baptist in Luke 3, it compels him to go around proclaiming a message of good news to all people. If there’s brokenness, God will fix it. If there’s injustice, God will right it. If there’s oppression, God will oppose it.

When the word of the Lord comes down, when God starts to speak, the broken, bruised, and burned out people, places, and things in our lives begin to heal. Because God is found wherever love is needed most. When you want to hear God speak and know what God sounds like, look for the places where love is taking root in our world. That’s where you can hear God the clearest. That’s where you find peace.

-Rev. Kevin Wright

Reflect & Respond

Where do you see love taking root in our world?

Where are the places that you can hear God the clearest?

Saturday, December 15

Luke 1:47-50

My spirit celebrates God, my Liberator!

For though I'm God's humble servant,

God has noticed me.

Now and forever,

I will be considered blessed by all generations.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

holy is God's name!

From generation to generation,

God's lovingkindness endures.

Mary didn't believe the lies of the cruel empire. Nor did she swallow the bitter shame of her gender. Nor did she trust the intolerance. For though people saw Mary as poor, she knew that she was highly favored by God. They saw a teenage slave. But God saw her as the most blessed among women. They saw a pregnant girl, someone who ought to be stoned. But she understood that she was bearing God.

Even though it went against every fact that surrounded her, Mary could see a world where the hungry would be filled and promises would be kept. Mary could see God's vision. She dreamt God's dream.

Mary had the eye of God.

-Rev. Carol Howard Merritt

Reflect & Respond

What does it mean to have the eye of God?

In your own words, what is God's vision and dream for our world?

The Third Week of Advent

listen online at trcnyc.org/BeStillAndGo

Sunday, December 16

Psalm 98: 4-6

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

*Joy to the world; the Lord is come; let earth receive her King:
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing.*

-Isaac Watts

The subtle power of this song is that forces me to confront the reality that I am perfectly content singing joy to my world, or maybe even our world, so long as I like the people around me. But joy to the world?

It's easy to say that you want the best for everyone but then you celebrate and smile when your enemies find themselves under investigation from special council. It's easy to say that God loves everyone without confronting the reality that we rarely do the same. It's easy to sing a song you probably memorized as a child without stopping to think about what it is actually inviting you to do: Joy to the world. The whole world. Joy to every dictator and everyone named Donald and all the people I disagree with online.

Joy to the world.

-Rev. Jim Keat

Reflect & Respond

If you're honest, who are the people that you do not want to have joy? What difference would it make if your prayer for "joy to the world" could extend to them as well?

Monday, December 17

Zephaniah 3:14, 20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.

In the little book of Zephaniah, images of God's power and love are extreme. They are a consuming fire and a crooning song. A fire that purifies rather than destroys. A fire that will not tolerate human evil. A fire that invites our singing because it originates from God's sung delight in us.

The bleak beginning ends with joy – the holy parent rejoicing over us with singing. We need not fear the dark. Not the dark of winter nor the dark of these tumultuous times. God is with us and like a loving mother, God will bring us home.

-Rev. Adriene Thorne

Reflect & Respond

What is one way that you remember that God is with you?

What does “home” mean to you? In your own words, what does it mean for God to “bring us home”?

Tuesday, December 18

A Modern Magnificat by Joy Cowley

My soul sings in gratitude.

I'm dancing in the mystery of God.

The light of the Holy One is within me
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.

This goes deeper than human thinking.

I am filled with awe

at Love whose only condition
is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud,
for they have no room for it.

The strong and self-sufficient ones
don't have this awareness.

But those who know their emptiness
can rejoice in Love's fullness.

It's the Love that we are made for,
the reason for our being.

It fills our inmost heart space
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.

Reflect & Respond

Look up the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and rewrite it in your own words. What words or phrases do you keep from the original? What new words and phrases do you add?

Copy your version of Mary's Song and share it online.

Wednesday, December 19

Isaiah 12:2

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
God has become my salvation.

The Good News of Jesus is that God entered the pit. God walks the valley. God is knowable. Emmanuel, God with us, is everywhere, waiting to be discovered. We can see God and hear God and taste God and touch God and smell God. The prophet Isaiah says that God is my Salvation. God is my strength. God is my song.

When you are saved from circumstances, from troubles, from oppression, or even saved from yourself, Look around. You are seeing God. When you feel a ripple of energy and the strength to survive one more day, You are feeling God. When you sing a song in the shower and you reach for those high notes because you are alone and safe at last, you are hearing the voice of God.

A New Testament writer gave us another clue in our quest to see God. The writer said "God is love."

When you experience love, this radical opposition to a world of fear and hate, when you experience love, you are experiencing God.

-Amanda Meisenheimer

Reflect & Respond

Where are you seeing, tasting, touching, feeling God today?

If God is your song, what are some of the lyrics?

Thursday, December 20

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

-The Peace of the Wild Things, Wendell Berry

In Advent we, like the poet, name our fears, our anxieties, our heavy responsibilities. Advent is the uncertainty and anticipation of a first pregnancy. Advent is exile, fear, and homelessness. Advent is haunted dreams and wakeful midnights. Yet Advent is when we find the peace of wild things.

-Farley Lord

Reflect & Respond

In your own words, what does it mean for Advent to be “the peace of the wild things”?

Friday, December 21

Luke 3:15-18

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

In Advent we get to sit still, to be still, and to meditate in quiet anticipation of the great celebration to come. Luke’s telling of the importance of John is just the kind of nourishment we need in a season like this.

The world is so good at grabbing and holding our attention, demanding our engagement—unfortunately in so much that is trivial, mere distractions from what really matters, and if it isn’t the trivial then it’s another tragic event. We can’t change that kind of hatred overnight. Part of our work will always be: relationships, truth, forgiveness, giving, being and doing in the world—acts of kindness and mercy, transforming work to change the balance of power, to redistribute God’s abundance among especially those who are too often left outside in the cold. After all the meditating is done, not forever, but for the moment—we are called to act—to follow Jesus into the world—doing the gospel.

-Rev. Michael Livingston

Reflect & Respond

How would you explain what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit to an eight year old?

What else would you add to Rev. Livingston’s list of what “our work will always be”?

Saturday, December 22

Luke 1:49-55

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
Her mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before her.
Her bared his arm and showed her strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
She knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
She embraced his chosen child, Israel;
she remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what she promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

In these moments when being a Christian is so grievously misrepresented in our culture, it would do us well to listen carefully to the song of Mary, the original resistor. She calls to us from the distance of thousands of years, to listen, and to believe her. She's a prophet speaking truth to power, as any of us who claim to follow Jesus should be, and she calls us all to summon the courage to find our own voices, to tell the truth about injustice, and to call forth God's dreams for our world.

Raise your own voice. And listen.

-Pastor Amy Butler

Reflect & Respond

What do you hear when you listen to the voice of Mary and the voices of women in our world?

When you think of all that God has done for you, what is your song?

The Fourth Week of Advent

listen online at trcnyc.org/BeStillAndGo

Sunday, December 23

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

“Love came down to us at Christmas with the birth of Jesus. Christmas marks the entry of love enfleshed in the world. During times like these that we are living in I so long for the love that surrounds the Christmas season. I pray daily for a softened heart that will remain open, that will dare greatly to love.”

-Rev. Bruce Lamb

Reflect & Respond

How have you seen love enfleshed in the world around you?

What would it look like for you to dare greatly to love today?

Monday, December 24

Isaiah 52:7-8

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.

Isaiah 52 talks about watchmen, people on lookout, who lift up their voices and bring good news to those who wait, news about all the good things that God longs for and calls us to pursue with one another, things like peace, wholeness, and most of all, love.

That's what we recall in the celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas: that love, vulnerable, fragile, just like the tender life of a baby born to immigrant parents running for their lives, is more powerful than anything in all the world.

We can point those around us to the real meaning of Christmas no matter what day of the year it is, in how we forgive and seek forgiveness, in how we spend our money, in how we risk for love, in how we volunteer our time to causes that matter, in how we vote, in how we challenge boundaries between ourselves and others different from us, in how we hold open to hope even when circumstances are dire we can change the world by pointing it away from the darkness of hate and into the wonder of Christmas Day.

-Minister Christian Peele

Reflect & Respond

What will you do to point to the real meaning of Christmas?



