



**THE 2023 APA DEANERY OF  
APPALACHIA**

# **Advent Devotional**

Meditations from the Deanery as well as APA  
Canons, Area Deans, Archdeacons, and Bishops

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**Edited *by* Father Paul Rivard,**  
**Dean of Appalachia**

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In memory of  
The Right Reverend Dr. Larry Shaver

*When the old world drew on toward night,  
Thou camest, not in splendor bright  
As monarch, but the humble child  
Of Mary, blameless mother mild.*

*At thy great name of Jesus, now  
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow:  
And things celestial thee shall own,  
All things terrestrial, Lord alone.*

*Come in thy holy might, we pray;  
Redeem us for eternal day  
From every power of darkness, when  
Thou judges all the sons of men.*

Latin, 9th Century  
(1940 Episcopal Church Hymnal, Number 6)

## Prologue

Advent is one of the two major penitential seasons of the Church kalendar, and along with the later Lenten fast of spring, these wintery weeks are meant to serve as a time of preparation for a feast. It is Christmastide when awestruck souls should open wide to contemplate the mystery of the incarnation and spiritually feast upon the endless love of God displayed in that incomprehensible act of condescension that blessed all creation in a tiny stall in Bethlehem. Adventtide, on the other hand, is a time to prepare. In Christmas we hope to feast on the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, and peace. The heart sings of love divine, joy to the world, and peace on earth with more savor and sincerity after it has been purified with earnest penitence. In Advent we intentionally take the time to till and tend to the soil of our souls in preparation for a plentiful harvest. Offering to God the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer according to the 1928 Book of Common Prayer is a fantastic way for Anglicans to add discipline to the Advent season.

Meditations in this devotional have been contributed by the APA Deanery of Appalachia along with APA Area Deans, Canons, Archdeacons, and Bishops. The works follow the passages appointed in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer lectionary for Morning and Evening Offices and are meant to enhance your rule of life for the next weeks. As you cooperate with the Holy Spirit this Advent, it is my hope that these meditations serve their intended purpose – to help you fast in preparation for the feast of Christmastide. In daily preparing yourself to embrace Christ on the feast of the Incarnation, may your soul also be set to receive the Lord at His final advent whenever that day may come.

Father Paul Rivard

Dean of Appalachia, Rector of Saint George the Martyr  
Simpsonville, SC

## Advent 1 - Sunday, December 3

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*“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”*

Malachi 3:3 (Morning Prayer, First Lesson)

**T**he first lesson of the first day of Advent is taken from the book of the prophet Malachi. Malachi, whose name means “my messenger,” writes four centuries before Christ, speaking of another messenger who will come to make one final attempt at preparing the chosen people for the ultimate fulfillment of their divine covenant. At his time, the temple had just been rebuilt after its first destruction and Malachi’s sharp words were largely addressed at the priesthood of the day, who so timidly, reluctantly, and half heartedly resumed the temple worship commanded by God. Malachi warns that faithlessness will not go unnoticed asking, “But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap.” As if the warnings had not been serious enough until that point, Malachi entreats God’s people in the last few sentences of his prophecy to “remember ye the law of Moses” and expect to see Elijah’s return “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

We should note here at the outset of this season of expectation, that God is not opposed to granting his people a vision of the future unaccompanied by explanation. Four centuries before Christ, who could have understood that this passage would apply to John the Baptist, or that the “messenger of the covenant” could be understood to be God

himself incarnate in human flesh? Likewise, as we read this passage we see that it is partially fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, but utterly fulfilled in a second coming. In preparation for this second coming we are in much the same position as those first readers of Malachi. They awaited the first coming of Christ. We await his return. While neither of us could know the day or the hour that we prepare for, the instruction for us both is the same. It is the message that Jesus speaks to us Himself in today's second lesson for Morning prayer which concludes the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and has our Lord saying, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13).

Malachi prophesies that when the "messenger of the covenant" comes, He will purge us as gold and silver, He will refine us as with fire, He will wash us as with fuller's soap. We hear the words of Malachi as we begin to anticipate the great feast of the Incarnation and Christ's first coming, but we listen closely to another meaning as we prepare ourselves for his second coming. The refiner's fire must purge us as silver and gold in these penitential seasons because make no mistake, an offering is yet required of us. We must offer our selves, our souls, and our bodies. Before we despair at how blemished that offering is we should take heart. When we cooperate with the Great Purifier, He cleanses us so that we can make our offering to the Lord in righteousness. Let us use this season to cooperate with God's grace, to earnestly prepare a pure offering to the King both at Christmastide and ultimately on "that great and dreadful day of the Lord."

Father Paul Rivard  
Dean of Appalachia  
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Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 1 - Monday, December 4

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*“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”*

Revelation 3:20 (Evening Prayer, Second Lesson)

**T**he season of Advent is a time of preparation to receive our Lord. It reminds us that our Lord comes to us in many ways. We think of his first coming, as the Babe of Bethlehem, where we receive him as one of us. Advent also reminds us of our Lord’s Second Coming, when he will return with great majesty and power, and we will receive him as our judge.

But there is another Advent, that our Lord instituted, where he comes to us as our heavenly food, and we receive him as our Savior and Redeemer. Here in the letter to Laodicea in the Book of Revelation, our Lord points toward this more intimate and personal Advent. He comes to us and stands at the door and knocks. Our Lord wants to come into our homes and into our lives. He wants to have fellowship with us. Jesus wants to sup with us and to be our heavenly food.

If we hear his voice saying, “This is my Body” and, “This is my blood,” and we open the door of our heart to him, he will feed us himself. Like with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can know Jesus intimately and personally in the breaking of bread. He comes to the door of our heart as our meat and drink.



The reception of the Eucharist is a profound advent of our Lord that brings us closer to him. When he knocks at our door, do we say through the closed door that there is no room in our homes and in our lives for him? Do we tell him we are too busy with the obligations and cares of the world? They turned him and his family away at every door in Bethlehem because the people didn't discern who it was that was knocking. Is there anything more important in our lives than receiving Jesus in his blessed sacrament? He still stands at the door and knocks.

The liturgy gives us the great example of how to receive our Lord when he knocks, it is the example of the humble centurion, who doesn't even dare to invite our Lord into his home, instead praying, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." This is the humility that David knew was pleasing to God, when he writes in the 51st Psalm, "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." We too must receive the Advent of Christ in his sacrament with all humility and a broken and contrite heart.

In the Advent Season we prepare for our Lord's coming. Let us especially prepare for his coming as our heavenly food. Let us prepare our homes and our hearts for him, so that when he knocks, we are ready to receive him.

Father Matthew Harlow  
Dean of the Deep South  
Rector of Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church  
Fort Valley, GA

## Advent 1 - Tuesday, December 5

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*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...”*

Mark 1:15a (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

**A**t Morning Prayer this day, we read in St. Mark's Gospel Jesus' first words as He begins His ministry, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...” His words are very appropriate to be read here at the beginning of Advent, as we prepare for His Coming as the Word made flesh and His Second Coming as King of kings and Lord of lords. What our Savior is signaling to us is that all that has been concealed in the Old Testament about God's plan of salvation for mankind is now to be revealed...in Him!

In the very same sentence, He also gives us the recipe, if you will, for how we should respond to His announcement, “...repent, and believe in the gospel.” Repent. The familiar refrain of all the prophets who have gone before. The hymn writer Clifford Bax put it quite succinctly over hundred years ago when he wrote, “Turn back [to God], O man, forswear thy foolish ways.” The prophet Isaiah gives us a dire warning in this morning's Old Testament Lesson (Is. 1:21-28) of the consequences of failing to turn back and forswear our foolish ways. This turning back, this forswearing our foolish ways, though, is not enough. Our Savior makes it quite clear that repentance must be

accompanied by believing in the gospel. The gospel, the good news, is simply what Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” His words were true when he spoke them and are true today for us. The time is now. The kingdom of God is now. This is the gospel and this good news is found in Christ Jesus.

Once we repent and believe the good news found in Christ Jesus, we are able to see the promise foretold by Isaiah in the Old Testament Lesson (Is. 2:1-5) at Evening Prayer of the many blessings that will be bestowed upon us by faithfully being in His presence. We will then “walk in the light of Lord” for the remainder of our days on this earth. When He then returns at His Second Coming, finding us faithful, He will open unto us the gates of heaven, where the Throne of Glory abides, as described in the final lesson at Evening Prayer (Rev. 4), to receive the final promise as sons and fellow heirs with Christ, as He says to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt. 25:21)

Father Erich Zwingert

Prebendary of the Diocese of the Eastern United States

Rector of All Saints Anglican Church

Mills River, NC

# Advent 1 - Wednesday, December 6

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*“And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”*

St. Mark 1:31 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

**J**esus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. What a beautiful scene, one that can easily be visualized. Jesus, the great physician, took the woman’s hand and lifted her, healing her body from fever. This passage is a sweet, warming-to-the-soul, glimpse into Jesus’ earthly ministry. However, what does not strike us immediately is her response. Peter’s mother-in-law served them. Immediately after being lifted from her sick bed by Christ, she began to serve them. The mother-in-law’s gratitude and her love for the Lord was expressed by action. She served.

The next day, while it was still dark, Jesus arose very early to pray. He went out to a desolate place, meaning he withdrew from the others for private prayer. When they found him, he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” We know from the passage that the whole city was gathered at the door of Peter’s house the night before, and Jesus healed many and cast out demons. Now he is preparing to go and preach throughout all of Galilee. Yet, Jesus took those precious, early morning hours and devoted that time to God the Father. He prayed.

Advent is a season of anticipation and hope. We anticipate the glorious celebration of the Incarnation and hope for that great day when Christ returns to complete the promise of redemption for all creation. Our reading from Morning Prayer reminds us of the call to every Christian to help bring all of it about. For we not only wait for the coming of our Lord...we prepare for it. St. Mark's Gospel gives us an excellent insight into maintaining an attitude of humility and reverence as we wait and prepare. We must serve. We must pray.

As we read our daily scripture lessons, it is easy to simply become a spectator to the scenes unfolding before us, but we are not spectators. We are, in fact, participants in Salvation. We too must rise at Christ's touch and serve. If our heart desires to grow ever closer to Jesus, to be Christ-like during our earthly ministry, we will be humble in our service to God and others. We also must pray as Christ prayed. If we long to grasp the infinite goodness of God, we will pray with reverence and without ceasing to the source of all love. In a few weeks, we will celebrate the coming of Christ, God Incarnate, in the humblest of circumstances. As we make our way through the church's liturgical calendar, we find ourselves at the foot of the cross on Good Friday and witness to our Lord's final words of prayer as He gives himself over to death for our sins. Celebrate the Incarnation. Rejoice at the Resurrection of our Lord. Devote yourself daily to service and prayer as we wait and prepare for Christ to return.

Deaconess Cynthia Hensley  
All Saints Anglican Church  
Mills River, NC

# Advent 1 - Thursday, December 7

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*"And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him."*

Mark 1:41 (Morning Prayer, First Lesson)

**B**iblical leprosy was a socially catastrophic disease that had profoundly pervasive effects on the lives of those infected. Modern day leprosy (Hansen's disease), which was likely included under the broader umbrella of the biblical term, is a physically-disfiguring, infectious disease that can severely affect the skin and peripheral nerves and ultimately cause loss of function and loss of body parts. Levitical teaching on leprosy strictly declared a physical state of uncleanness and mandated the isolation of infected or potentially infected individuals "outside the camp."

The devastating, life-altering consequences of leprosy can easily be imagined. The "covering upon his upper lip" (possible evidence for the Hebrews' accurate appreciation of potential respiratory transmission) and the isolation requirement makes one recollect the masks and quarantines (and their associated psychological and logistical life effects) mandated in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his classic historical fiction novel *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, Lew Wallace poignantly captures the psychological, physical, and sociocultural effects of Biblical-time leprosy when he portrays Judah Ben Hur forsaking his own health, breaking Levitical proscription, and descending into the lepers' camp to search for his leprous mother and sister Tirzah. Like the man in today's lesson, the Ben Hurs were healed of their disease by a personal and physical encounter with Christ the Messiah.

Because of its disfiguring effects, seeming self-perpetuation, contagion, and socio-familial consequences, leprosy has become a classic metaphorical representation of sin and sin's effects on our lives. Both leprosy and sin are, apart from specific healing, lifelong afflictions that are infectious, progressive, and injurious to body and soul.

In our lesson today, we see the eternal Creator of the cosmos frozen in a single moment in time focusing His Divine compassion on an ostracized leper. We see God incarnate (who “clothed himself in vile man's flesh that so He might be weak enough to suffer woe” [John Donne]) suffer to touch the vile flesh of a disfigured and forsaken outcast while on His own path of affliction en route to being forsaken by His own Father to redeem His own creatures who had forsaken Him. What a perfect picture of our Lord - Immanent Transcendence, enfleshed Logos, and time-clothed Eternity - fulfilling His eternal and cosmological telos (as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”) by touching the lowest of His creatures at one moment in time at one place on the planet.

This Adventtide, as we both remember and look for the coming of the Christ, may we realize that we have as much need as this leprous man for our Lord's compassion and touch. May we cultivate the creaturely posture of this leper who came, beseeched, and knelt humbly before his Maker. For God is with us and amongst us! He came to seek and to save. He stands at the door and knocks. He emptied himself that we might be full. He is reaching to touch us that we might be clean.

Doctor Eric Byrd  
Seminararian at All Saints Anglican Church  
Mills River, NC

## Advent 1 - Friday, December 8

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*“But my trust is in thy mercy, and my heart is joyful in thy salvation. I will sing of the Lord, because he hath dealt so lovingly with me; yea, I will praise the Name of the Most Highest.”*

Psalm 13:5-6 (Evening Prayer)

**T**he story is often shared about a young man named Lawrence, who had been raised in the 1930s in an extreme evangelical protestant home. He said that as a boy he only heard the name of Mary once or twice a year, only around Christmas time, and each time with a little frisson of “being bad.” When Lawrence went off to college half the country away, he, as do many youth in America, dropped his religion on the way. During his college years, his mother was in an automobile accident and was seriously injured. A man with no faith, he had nowhere to turn, until he opened up to his roommate, Joseph, about his fears and sorrow. Joseph was an Anglican and suggested Lawrence talk to his mother. In exasperation, Lawrence replied that he couldn't; his mother was not even conscious. Joseph explained that he meant his spiritual mother, the mother of all Christians, the Virgin Mary. Lawrence was distraught and went with his friend to the shrine of our Lady at the university chapel, where Lawrence prayed for his mother and Joseph prayed for his friend. Lawrence told the story years later when he began his studies for ordination, admitting that this was the turning point in his life when he began his turn to Christianity.



We too can turn to the Mother of our Lord when we need solace, comfort, and understanding. As Lawrence said later in his life, “it is impossible for us to love Christ’s mother more than he does.” Is it any wonder that the psalms appointed for today find connections to the song of our Lady that we pray every evening. She herself prayed the psalms, as they were Israel’s hymnbook, and naturally many phrases found their way into the song of joy and gladness she burst into. How natural it is for us to turn to our spiritual mother and ask her prayers.

When we Anglican Catholics pray our office today, on the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we would be deaf indeed not to hear echoes from the psalter resonating with the themes of the day. Father Andrew, the famous Anglican Franciscan, put it this way in 1940, “The Magnificat is the music of earth answering the music of heaven as it comes down to earth in the Incarnation of Christ, caught up in that music, and taken back to heaven again.” As the old hymn puts it, “O higher than the Cherubim, / more glorious than the seraphim, / lead their praises, Alleluia!”

*O ALMIGHTY God, who didst endue with singular grace the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord: Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to hallow our bodies in purity, and our souls in humility and love; through the same our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

Father Richard Bugyi-Sutter

Assisting Priest at Saint George the Martyr Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 1 - Saturday, December 9

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*“And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.”*

Mark 2:14 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

**O**ctavian Augustus established the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace, in 27 B.C. It extended through his successors until 180 A.D. Its European boundaries extended from Britain in the north to Egypt in the south, Armenia in the east and Spain in the west. Rome’s rule established unprecedented peace and economic prosperity. Law and Order were prevalent. Water flowed through aqueducts, public latrines were serviceable, grain was superabundant, and the Legion protected all roads leading to Rome. So long as every man left every other man alone, minded his own business, the business of the Empire proceeded apace. The last of the *Pax Romana* Emperors was the mostly-just, temperate, courageous, prudent, Stoic Marcus Aurelius. His only blemish had been his persecution and torture of the Christian Martyrs of Lyons in 177. He was succeeded by his megalomaniacal son Commodus, who ended the *Pax*.

Interweaving the *Pax Romana* was that strange but not necessarily ignoble community of religionists known as the Christians. Edward Gibbon tells us that the Romans who cared to notice the Christians, and thankfully most didn’t, regarded them as “obstinate and perverse enthusiasts, who exacted an implicit submission to their mysterious doctrines, without being able to produce a single argument that could engage the attention of men of sense and learning” (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*).

But while Rome slept and indulged the luxury of their own Manifest Destiny, Ancient Christians were hard at work with the Grace of God building another kind of Empire. They followed

one Jesus of Nazareth whom His Apostles maintained was not only the King of the Jews but the King of the Universe. The same Jesus, condemned by the Jews for blasphemy and a potential traitor to Rome, had engaged in a brief but thoughtful and learned discourse with one of the Emperor Tertullian's own Roman Governors, Pontius Pilate. The Gospel writers record different aspects of the dialectic. St. John tells us that in answer to Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Jesus wonders if Pilate is making his own conclusion or relying on what the Jews claim. Pilate denies being a Jew and exclaims, "What hast thou done?" Jesus replies, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence...To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (St. John xviii. 35,36). Pilate responds, good Stoic and Sceptic that he is, "What is truth?" (*Idem*)

For Romans, the greatest religious truth was that there were many truths, no one being absolute. Rome was called by a kind of Manifest Destiny to protect a civilization full of comparative religions. Here, all men could come as close to God as possible with the protection of the Roman Legion.

The Christian Religion posed a definitive challenge. Christ's Kingdom is not of this world. The Coliseum at Rome trembled, the roads were less secure and Caesar's fortunes were imperiled. Levi, Matthew, the tax collector's revenues suddenly lost all value because another King had come into the world by Grace with promise for an irresistible treasure - eternal life, full of joy with God the Father, through Jesus, the King of the Everlasting Imperium, with the *Pax Christiana*, through the Holy Ghost, forever. Manifest Destiny had run into a hitch.

Father William Martin  
Rector of Saint Michael and All Angels  
Arden, NC

## Advent 2 - Sunday, December 10

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*“Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way  
and walk in the law of the LORD.”*

Psalm 119:1 (Morning Prayer)

**I**n an interview with the Catholic Weekly, the esteemed and award-winning foreign affairs journalist from Australia, Greg Sheridan, made the following observation, “Most of the world is getting more religious, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, but Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America are heading towards unbelief.” He went on to say, “We’re becoming not so much a post-Christian society as almost a pre-Christian society.” Sheridan notes that this crisis of faith stems from “a crisis of knowledge.”

In the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent we pray, “Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

This prayer corresponds with our reading of Psalm 119:1-16. The Psalmist begins by saying, “Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way and walk in the law of the LORD” (v.1). The emphasis on being blessed and walking in the way of the Lord is repeated throughout Psalm 119. We

are to be people devoted to reading Scripture because it points us to Jesus who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). As we encounter Jesus in Scripture, and seek to follow his way, he imparts to us the “blessed hope of everlasting life.” The opposite is true as well. To quote the great biblical scholar, St. Jerome: “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

The Church, however, provides an invaluable tool to better understand Scripture and grow deeper in our love for Christ. This great treasure is The Book of Common Prayer. The rhythm and routine of daily prayer teaches us to watch and pray (see: Mark 13:33-37) so that we are prepared for the coming of our Savior.

Morning Prayer gives us a digestible amount of Scripture to ponder and pray throughout each day. We should then seek to end our day with Christ in our minds, hearts, and upon our lips, concluding with Evening Prayer. Such a daily routine provides us with greater knowledge of our Lord as we seek to live lives of faith in Christ Jesus. Advent is the perfect time to start such godly habits as we look for “that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

As we seek to be steeped in holy Scripture, and follow the way of our Savior, may our desire be that of the Psalmist who said, “Thy word have I hid within my heart, that I should not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).

Father Wade Miller  
Anglican Province of America Canon Missioner  
Rector of Saint Philip's Anglican Church  
Blacksburg, VA

## Advent 2 - Monday, December 11

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*“Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God; for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.”*

Psalm 42:6-7 (Evening Prayer)

**P**salms 42 and 43 give us a picture of a person that longs for God, but who is in sore distress. This theme is repeated throughout the Scriptures. The righteous suffer at the hands of the wicked. They call out to God to defend them and to punish the wicked. However, the deeper question is, why do the righteous suffer in the first place? Indeed, if the faithful are following God, keeping his commandments, fleeing sin, then why do they suffer so much in the world?

One of the best ways to understand the Psalms is to recognize that they are ultimately about Jesus Christ. It is the Son of God whose “soul is athirst for God.” It is the Son of God, facing injustice at the hands of Romans and Jews who can say: “My bones are smitten asunder as with a sword, while mine enemies that trouble me cast me in the teeth; Namely, while they say daily unto me, Where is now thy God? Why art thou so vexed, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God; for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God” (Psalm 42:12-15).

Our Lord tells us that the wicked have oppressed the just from the time of Cain and Abel. When God himself came amongst His creatures, they despised and murdered Him. In St. John’s Gospel it is written that “the light shineth in

darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” and “that was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Since a servant is not above his Master, it is certain that we who follow Christ will also suffer for our faith in Him.

Nevertheless, the Psalms give us hope. Although the wicked oppress the righteous, the righteous remain faithful since it is written “O put thy trust in God; for I will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.” In another place the Lord tells us “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” We have hope, because Christ has endured the shame, scorned the suffering, and has risen from the dead for our justification. Just as we suffer with and for Christ, so we will be glorified in Him.

Father Joshua Kimbril  
Rector of Saint Matthew’s Anglican Church  
Weaverville, NC

## Advent 2 - Tuesday, December 12

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*“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven...”*

Revelation 12:7-8 (Evening Prayer, Second Lesson)

In ages past men and women have held Angels in too high regard, paying them excessive honor and even at times blurring the lines between veneration, respect and the supreme worship due to Almighty God alone. In our time there is some revival of this particular form of creature worship, but the chief sin of our day, a day of the self-adoration, of an educated age, such as our own, is the reverse. It is to relegate Angels to the superstitious, the primitive, the childish, and the so-called non-scientific. In our day, angels, like most other supernatural wonders, are largely jokes, made for silly, sentimental Hollywood movies in which they are pictured as Marvel Superheroes or a bunch of confused French Existentialists just full of ennui. Or even more likely than not they are a version of mythological creature like the Tooth Fairy.

But we are blessed to be members of the Church of God. And members in particular of a Church that lives by a classical Book of Common Prayer. And that Book of Common Prayer provides us with several yearly reminders that the world we live in is much larger, much deeper, and much richer than we will ever be able to observe empirically and control as instruments of our will. You are members of a Church that is bold to declare that there is a grave danger in resting in things seen, while forgetting the things unseen.

The Church declares that there are two worlds – “the visible, and the invisible,” as the Creed puts it. There is the world we see and the world that we cannot now see. The world that we do not see is as real as the world that we do see. Whether we see it or



not, whether we can lay hold of it or not, it really exists. We know that the external world really exists not merely because we see it, but because we can intelligibly grasp what we see. We see the sun, the moon, the starry sky, the green grass and the blue oceans. And we see men and women and their work in cities, stately buildings, libraries and court houses. All we may observe forms one immense, splendid world. It spreads from this little ball of dirt we inhabit through our solar system and on to oceans of galaxies.

And yet in spite of the grandeur of the world we see, there is another world deeper and older. That world is as close to us as the visible world and more wonderful with numberless invisible creatures coming and going, watching, working, and waiting.

Here is the habitat of Angels. They are active in parish Church, assisting us in the worship of the Blessed Trinity. They move up and down the aisles as we worship, they hover around the Altar, awestruck by the Blessed Sacrament. If we could see for only a second the majesty, the beauty, the power of these ministering spirits, if only for a moment the scales could fall from our eyes, we would likely never want to leave.

When we enter the church we slip to our knees to say a prayer. We ask God's blessing upon the service, the ministers, and the congregation. We ask God to prepare our hearts to receive his love and his truth in both Word and Sacrament. As we worship God the Blessed Trinity we are drawn into a cosmic struggle within the invisible world – all the company of Heaven: Angels and archangels and all the blessed departed. We become a community at one with God and all of God's creatures, the Angels of God, and other creatures we have not even imagined, all of us together fulfilling our destiny of worshipping the Blessed Trinity.

Father Glenn Spencer  
Anglican Province of America Canon Theologian  
Rector of All Saints Anglican Church  
Charlottesville, VA

## Advent 2 - Wednesday, December 13

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*“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”*

Isaiah 11:6 (Morning Prayer, First Lesson)

**M**y three-year-old daughter has fallen in love with every animal she has ever met, especially our family cat. Being so young, she doesn't quite understand the particularities of cats, especially a cat's feelings of being touched. These boundaries are mysterious even for experienced cat owners. So, my daughter was extremely surprised one day after running up to our cat and vigorously petting him, that he hissed and swiped at her. He scratched her on the hand which caused my daughter to run to us in tears. Her feelings were hurt more than her hand.

My daughter experienced, although in a very small way, one of the symptoms of the Fall, which we sometimes forget about: the corruption of the natural world. The Fall not only impacted humanity's relationship with God, but it also disrupted creation's relationship with itself. The very ground itself became cursed so that working in the field would be more difficult. Death entered the world, not just for humans, but also for all living beings. Death did not only come with old age but began to be purposely caused. We now had to hunt for survival. Wolves began to prey on lambs, leopards started attacking kids (goats), lions began

to stalk calves, the animal kingdom became divided into predator and prey.

The Prophet Isaiah gives us a picture of all of creation being restored by this promised Messiah. He begins Chapter 11 by telling us how this rod out of the stem of Jesse will possess all the qualities that are needed to restore creation. He will have the spirit of the Lord upon Him, a spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. He will start first with humans, restoring the divide we have with God, then restoring the divide among ourselves. He will restore the division between the poor and rich, between the righteous and the wicked, and even between Jew and Gentile (vs. 10).

He won't stop there, however; even the animal kingdom will be cleansed from the stain of the Fall. There will no longer be predator and prey, no longer will death be needed for survival. Children will be able to play with the most dangerous of animals in peace, without fear. God's plan of salvation involves all of creation; nothing will be left untouched. When the Messiah comes back, my daughter will be able to play with all the cats she can get her hands on, though they probably still won't like it. Come Lord, Come. Amen.

Father Scott Greene  
Rector of Holy Cross Anglican Church  
Farragut, TN

## Advent 2 - Thursday, December 14

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*“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit.”*

*Mark 4:20 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)*

**T**his morning, we read the very familiar parable of the sower, as taught by our Lord. This parable is especially notable, because Jesus made a point of explaining it to his closest associates after teaching it to the crowd following him. But Jesus did something else: he put out on the water in a boat, and taught from it. Now if you have spent any time around a body of water, you know what that water can do with the human voice. Very personal conversation can be heard by everyone on shore; and no electronics are needed. These two choices indicate that Jesus wanted this parable heard by as many as possible, and understood by those who would continue to sow and plant his Gospel after his time on earth was complete.

So what are the implications of this parable for the season of Advent? Obviously, the parable is about different responses to the message of the Gospel, called the “word” in the parable. The text itself explains the results of this seeding: the “way-siders,” the “shallow rooters,” the “choked out,” and, finally, those that bear good fruit up to an hundredfold.

Now what does this parable have to do with Advent? I hope it is not gardening, because my “brown thumb” is well known. No, rather, it is about different responses to the hearing of the Gospel. The sowing of seed implies that an harvest will follow at the end of the growing season: that time of harvest will be the return of our Lord Jesus Christ at the winding up of time itself. What shall we have done with the word of God which he has planted in our hearts? We hope that we are not among

the way-siders, shallow-rooters, or the choked-off. These, as the parable describes, won't even grow to harvest. Hopefully, we shall be the seed which has used the growing season to grow to maturity. We have been nourished by the Gospel, and used it to be its good fruit. But healthy, mature plants and people have another benefit: they grow seed of their own, and become the seed crop of the next generation; so the seed of one planting may become the sowers of the next.

During this season of Advent, I am encouraged to be a surviving, still-growing plant. I have been fortunate to have been watered and fed with the word since early age. I know harvest-time is coming, but I, more than ever, want to grow and mature until the last minute. I have grown up alongside shallow-rooters, way-siders, and the choked-off. They will be of no use at harvest.

Now I spoke briefly before about my "brown thumb." I hope I have learned from my early attempts that a successful crop needs not only good seed, but good soil. I must be soil that is favourable to growing the crop I sow. If the soil is lacking, it must be bettered by fertilizer; and the crop must be regularly watered.

The same principles apply to us as Christians. Now good soil and fertilizing are important at the time of planting; feeding and watering need to happen more frequently than with plants. Our sower has provided us with this food and water: daily prayer and weekly Holy Communion, the food that we need to grow into good fruit. May we use these to bless our Advent!

Deacon Thad Osborne  
Rector of Saint Matthew's Anglican Church  
Weaverville, NC

## Advent 2 - Friday, December 15

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*“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary,  
that the babe leaped in her womb;  
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

Luke 1:44

**I**n the first chapter of Luke’s gospel, we witness a visit between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth. We also witness in this reading two miraculous pregnancies, that of Mary who conceived by the Holy Spirit; and Elizabeth at an old age and who had previously been infertile. Upon meeting, the actions of the two unborn babies, Jesus and John the Baptist, illustrate a moment of revelation and recognition. We see in this encounter between Mary and Elizabeth both the unfolding of God’s divine plan for humanity and a prophecy fulfilled. Further, this visit exemplifies how the ordinary becomes the extraordinary and how the sacred mingles with the profane in God’s plan and purpose for His children. Through this innocent encounter between two women, we witness the convergence between heaven and earth in perfect harmony. We witness the affirmation of faith by both women, the embodiment of hope for a brighter future, and the profound act of God’s love for His creation in the sending His only begotten son Jesus to die in our place so that we can live.

This encounter also affirms the extraordinary purpose that God has for each of our lives. For inasmuch as the Lord blessed Elizabeth and Mary, God also blesses us with His divine presence and His promise that He will always be with us and watch over us and that if we abide in Him then He will abide in us.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives then fears, anxieties, and distractions in life seems like less of a hardship and more like God preparing us for His purpose. It is

important to understand that God's purpose for us is two-fold. The first purpose is for us to prepare ourselves in anticipation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The second is for us to share the good news about Jesus and in so doing help others prepare as well. This is what is meant by "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mat. 22:39). C.S. Lewis succinctly captures this thought in his sermon titled *The Weight of Glory* where he states:

The load or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back....It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All daylong we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

It is with this in mind, to love ourselves and one another, that we prepare diligently in anticipation for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This after all is the true meaning of the Advent season.

Father Yossi Sarid  
Vicar of St. Peter the Apostle Anglican Church  
Kingsport, TN

## Advent 2 - Saturday, December 16

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*“Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”*

Mark 4:30-32 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

**S**o much of life begins very small and grows very big! Mustard seeds are about 1 millimeter in size. The mustard plant is about one meter in height, thus 1,000 times the size of the seed.

As we ponder the upcoming celebration of the birth of our Lord, consider that a single-cell egg becomes 26,000,000,000 (billion) cells at birth, and 36,000,000,000,000 (trillion) cells as an adult.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God explodes in growth just as a mustard seed grows into a mature plant. At our synod meetings in Orlando this fall, Bishop Chad Jones in his charge exhorted us that “Our Diocese is remarkably stable, holding steady, the healthiest and strongest in the Continuum, and has been indubitably blessed, but the Lord intends us to grow.” Further, he said that “We need to act more quickly, authoritatively, and decisively in building up the Church” as “the window of opportunity for action for Christ and His Church we have heretofore enjoyed is



beginning to narrow.” (See the entire charge posted on the APA website home page.)

Advent is a time of preparation. Just as the farmer carefully prepares his field for the planting of seeds and Mary carefully prepared herself for the birth of Jesus, we must be preparing for explosive growth of the kingdom of God and the second coming of our Lord during this “window of opportunity.” We can begin this preparation with a new dedication to prayer - prayer at Sunday Mass, prayer in the daily office, and in our personal prayers. “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

And so, in this advent season, let us prayerfully prepare for the coming growth of the kingdom of God in our churches, our communities, our country and our world.

O GOD, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scott Eddlemon

Seminarian at Saint Peter the Apostle Anglican Church  
Kingsport, TN

## Advent 3 - Sunday, December 17

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*“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

Isaiah 35 (Morning Prayer, First Lesson)

**A**dvent is a season of longing and hope in the spiritual life. Imagine you have lost your home, comfortable surroundings, the very places and spaces that provide you a sense of belonging and security. The experience is disorienting and brings sadness. If you can visualize this, you are entering the world to which Isaiah is speaking. His people are in exile from all that gives them meaning, and do not have the power to set themselves free. And yet, they hope. And now in the 35th chapter, the images of God’s salvation flow like a flood. “Be strong; fear not! God will come and save you...the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame will leap like a hart...” What a contrast to the sorrow of exile!!

In our Lord’s first reading and sermon, he selects this text from the prophet and then, with clear reference to himself, says that his reason for coming to his people is to fulfill these promises. This Gospel text is appointed for each Ember Day as a call to those who seek Holy Orders. It is a reminder of our reason for being; to be an icon of Christ who is salvation. *Salve*, a Latin greeting meaning to be well, to be whole, is the root of the word salvation, and Jesus brings that to each of us.

The candles, the texts, the hymns of Advent bring us into two contrasting worlds. An unlit candle reminds us of the reality of darkness. It may be the darkness of a culture which has turned in on itself without reference to God, or it may be the shadows of our own sin or guilt. Each is a form of exile where we are cut off from what gives us life. And a blazing candle calls us to cast an eye toward the coming light and release after which we all yearn.

What do you long for in your life? What hopes do you hold onto which bring light and hope? Rabbi Hugo Gryn was a survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp. He wrote, "For a while my father and I shared a barrack. In spite of the unspeakable horror and oppression, many Jews held on to what scraps of religious observance as they were able. One winter night someone reminded us that it was the first night of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights. My father constructed a little menorah of scrap metal. For a wick he used thread from his prison uniform. For oil, butter he somehow had obtained from a guard. Yet, I protested the "waste" of such calories. Would it not be better to share the butter on a crust of bread than to burn it?" "Hugo," said my father, "both you and I know that a person can live a very long time without food. But I tell you, a person cannot live a single day without hope!!" Advent beckons us to the One who is hope.

Father Mark Menees

Archdeacon - APA Diocese of the Eastern United States

Dean of Eastern North Carolina

Rector of Saint John's Anglican Church

Greensboro, NC

## Advent 3 - Monday, December 18

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*“And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.”*

Revelation 18:19 (Evening Prayer, Second Lesson)

**Y**ou could say Advent is “bifocal;” it has two foci. The first, and most enjoyable, is the focus on preparing to receive the Lord Jesus at his first coming.

Everybody loves those wonderful stories, the Annunciation, the miraculous birth, the infant in the manger, the visit of the shepherds, and the song of the angelic choir, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). Who has a heart so cold as it cannot be charmed by the first coming of Our Lord?

There is an understandable, if lamentable, tendency to avoid dwelling overmuch on the other focus, the second coming of Our Lord. Who wants to distract the faithful from the enjoyment of their preparations for Christmas? Yet, a cursory reading of Scripture makes it clear preparations for His second coming should be pursued assiduously. “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35-36).

The Scriptures, especially the Prophets and the Apocalyptic literature, give us powerful, often disturbing images of the “Day of the Lord.” The “Day of the Lord” can refer to the events surrounding our Lord’s coming “again in glory to judge the quick and the dead.” It can also refer to prophecies of historical events which have already come to pass yet may have a future eschatological fulfillment.

The one thing all these Scriptures make clear is when “The Day of the Lord” comes, it will be greeted with great joy by those who love and obey Him, as a day of vindication and

restoration; but for those do not, Isaiah warns, “Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” (Isaiah 13:6).

The issue for each of us is how we will greet Christ when he comes again, or when we experience our “personal eschaton,” if it comes first, which it may well do. Will it be the very best day in our lives, or will we say, “Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (Joel 1:15).

Simple prudence will make us want to be sure of our answer. If so, in addition to our festive preparations, it would behoove each of us to make a deep and searching examination of conscience during this Advent Season.

There are many good ways of making an examination of conscience. One of the best is to use a written guide. Such a guide makes us look into places we might not wish to but need to look. If you would like a recommendation on such a guide, your own priest would be, I am sure, glad to help you.

Then there is the problem of what to do with the results. Obviously, we will want to confess what we have found to God, seeking His forgiveness and the grace to do better in the future. (This is the true meaning of “repentance.”)

But also remember these words from the Second Exhortation:

“If there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to his priest, or to some other Minister of God’s Word, and open his grief; that he may receive such godly counsel and advice, as may tend to the quieting of his conscience, and the removing of all scruple and doubtfulness” (BCP p. 88).

Father Nicholas Henderson  
Vicar of Saint Patrick’s Mission  
Brevard, NC

## Advent 3 - Tuesday, December 19

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*“...Write...that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits...”*

Isaiah 30:8-10 (Morning Prayer, First Lesson)

**W**e all know or have heard of people leaving a church because they did not like the sermons or possibly the subjects preached about. If there's very much said about hell or the rebuke of God as a result of unrepentant sin, it causes them much discomfort and anxiety. They prefer to be told smooth things. They prefer for the preacher to turn aside from that path. They like to hear their nice sermons and then go live as the rest of the world does.

This was the case with the people of Israel and Judah. They rebelled against the Holy One of Israel. They refused to listen to His prophets and heed their warnings. They trampled God's laws and blamed God when the enemy trampled their cities. They did as they pleased, but they did not accept responsibility for their actions.

They said to Isaiah, “Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”

Sadly, this sounds all too familiar of our own rebellious culture, which says, do not speak of the God of Creation. We believe in our own evolution. Do not speak to us of God's laws or your out dated morality. We are our own authority. We live this way and go this path. Often, it even comes from within the church.

Sometimes when a child rebels, the father will forewarn them what will happen. If they persist in their ways, he simply leaves them to it. There is no need for punishment to be meted out for the consequences will be punishment enough. It is only then the child repents and returns.

The word Isaiah uses for wait is *Qavah*. It means to wait with expectation or to look forward with hope. Isaiah called the people to trust in God and wait for Him to act with hope and expectation; and not in their own cunning. They would have none of it and they suffered the consequences. History shows us this pattern is often repeated. Are there commands of God we refuse to acknowledge or have deemed irrelevant? Do we find ourselves trusting in ourselves or the powers of this world instead of God? We see that those who do this offend God.

Advent is more than a season of preparation in remembrance of His first coming. It is a way of life in preparation for His return to judge the living and the dead. The second coming will happen suddenly and unexpectedly like the breaking of a wall or a vessel.

Thankfully, Isaiah's words still ring true. Indeed, while we have time, let us search our hearts for any disobedience and repent, so that we may be found an acceptable people in His sight. Only in repentance and returning to God can we be saved. Only at the foot of the cross can we find rest in a restless world and the peace only God can give.

Let us wait upon the Lord with hope and expectation and not repeat history again.

Deacon Robert Shoup  
Saint Patrick's Mission  
Brevard, NC

## Advent 3 - Wednesday, December 20

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*"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings."*

Jeremiah 23:21-22 (Evening Prayer, First Lesson)

**E**very Advent, as we think about the coming of Christ, we are reminded of all of the prophecies in the bible that foretold his first advent. The people who delivered these prophecies were called prophets. In the New Testament, especially in Saint Matthew's Gospel, we see how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the words of the prophets, and that all of their messianic prophecies indicated that Jesus was indeed the long awaited messiah. This time of year in particular we enjoy hearing their prophecies put to music such as in Handel's magnificent oratorio "Messiah."

But there were also people in the bible people referred to as "false prophets." The label speaks for itself. These were people who claimed to be speaking for God –they claimed to be prophets– but really they were (at best) making up their own messages, or even (at worse) inspired by the devil and speaking his words. These are the people we see referenced in the passages from Jeremiah that we read today.

In the bible, false prophets mislead God's people and are out to serve themselves. Prophets rubbed shoulders with some of the most important people of their day –kings and queens, military leaders, and more. So it would be very tempting for an unethical person to pose as a prophet in



order to get ahead and even get rich. They were not concerned with living holy lives and obeying God's commandments. They were concerned about their own personal advancement. And the people who listened to false prophets inevitably got into trouble. They were led away from God; they were ripped off; and they were eventually carried away into exile.

Unfortunately for us, false prophets are not a thing of the past. There are still false prophets today –people who claim to speak for God (or something like him) but are doing nothing of the sort. People who tell us that we do not need God in our life, and that the bible is full of fairy tales, and that Jesus was just a wise teacher and not the Son of God are false prophets. People who tell us that we can create our own morality, or that there is no such thing as absolute truth, are false prophets. People who tell us that life is about getting rich and having a good time because once we die that is the end and there is no heaven or hell are false prophets. People who tell us all religions are the same, or having no religion at all is fine are false prophets.

In short, anyone or anything (i.e. an ideology) that leads us away from faith in God through Jesus Christ, or leads in that direction, is a false prophet and is to be avoided. We need to carefully scrutinize the messages presented to us in popular culture and elsewhere to see if they align with the teachings of scripture and the Church. We must realize that Satan is going to do whatever he can, and use any medium or messenger that he can think of, to try to lead us astray as he did the people of God in the days of Jeremiah.

Father Gordon Anderson  
Dean of the Mid-Atlantic States  
Rector of Saint Alban's Anglican Church  
Joppa, MD

## Advent 3 - Saint Thomas

### Thursday, December 21

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*“...Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

John 11:16 (Evening Prayer, Second Lesson)

**S**o says the apostle who declared a short time later, “Except I see ... I will not believe,” and thereby forever being known as Doubting Thomas. But I sometimes think that we are often just a little too hard on St Thomas. Let’s put ourselves in his shoes for a minute. He was with Jesus when Jesus was arrested, he knew that Jesus had been condemned and executed on a cross - by Roman soldiers, no less, who were experts at it - and he knew that Jesus had been buried inside a stone-sealed tomb. And if it had been to any one of us to whom our friends said, “Oh no, Jesus is alive once again,” we probably wouldn’t have believed it either.

But just eight days later, the following Sunday afternoon, while the disciples were once again locked away in a house, still hiding out of fear of being arrested and facing the same fate that Jesus did, our Lord gave St Thomas the chance: “Put your finger here,” Jesus said, “and see my hands. Put out your hand, and place it into my side. Do not be faithless, Thomas, but believe.”

And with that, St Thomas just said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God” - meaning that he finally recognized that everything that Jesus had ever claimed about himself really was true. And he proved it to be true raising himself from

the dead, just as he promised he would. St Thomas had seen with his eyes and believed.

But we don't really need that kind of "hard proof" in order to believe, for to demand it would undermine just about everything else that we know to be true about history. For instance, how do we know that Julius Caesar ever really lived? Or that Hannibal crossed the Alps? Or that George Washington crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night way back in 1776? How do we know any of these things to be true since we weren't there to see it for ourselves?

Well, we know them to be true because others, who did see these things for themselves, told us they are true, handing that information down to us; which is exactly how we know that most things in life are true: we know them to be true based on the experience of others. And that goes for the things that we hold to be true about our Christian faith as well: we believe because others, who did experience these things for themselves, have handed those experiences down to us.

And that is exactly what Jesus is saying when he said to St Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me, Thomas? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

And that, my friends, is you and it is me. Blessed are those of us who have not seen and yet we believe.

Father Michael L. Ward

Archdeacon - APA Diocese of the Eastern United States

Rector of Saint Mark's Anglican Church

Vero Beach, Florida

## Advent 3 - Friday, December 22

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*“...Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord...”*

2 Corinthians 5:5,6 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

**M**any people in today’s world are in great fear as to what will happen in the future, but we see here in these verses and the preceding verses in Chapter 5 that St. Paul has expressed his own desire to leave behind the tent of his dying, sin-saturated body and to occupy an eternal body that will exist forever. As we continue to live in this flesh, do we not also desire to let go of the deterioration and decay?

So much of St. Paul’s ministry to the Church is reminding us of our eternal inheritance and our heavenly citizenship. Although we have no tangible evidence of our future hope, nevertheless we accept it by faith because God has spoken in His Word, and God is faithful to His Word. We may have no tangible proof of our home in heaven, but faith is the evidence of unseen and invisible things, and we are to govern our lives by truths that have eternal and lasting value and not to set our hearts on the passing things of this temporal world.

St. Paul has been contrasting our failing earthly bodies with the glorified bodies which all who trust in Christ as

Savior will receive at His coming. Our present bodies are weak and dying. They are a temporary structure that continues to show signs of weakness and decay. But this earthen vessel will one day be glorified, the temporal will be replaced with the eternal, the mortal with the immortal, and our decaying form will be dressed in a glorious body that is equipped to live with Christ - in heaven forever.

St. Paul writes confidently that this will bring an end to the burden of life on this side of eternity and the “groaning,” the longing to be with God, which comes with it. In truth, this is the desire rooted in every believer in Jesus Christ. Why? Because that eternal life is what we are destined for, and so we wait, anticipating that glorious day when we can exchange our fleshly rags for a new reality. Salvation is not just for the soul or spirit, but for the body also. Resurrection is how God saves our bodies. We have a glorious new body to come.

Indeed, God has been preparing Christians for this transformation all along. It is the joyful fate of every believer. It is among the reasons people come to know and have faith in Christ in the first place: to experience the painless, deathless, fearless glory of eternity as He meant for us to experience it since the very beginning.

The Right Reverend Robert Todd Giffin  
Bishop Ordinary, Diocese of the Central and Western  
States, Anglican Province of America  
Rector of Saint Chad's Anglican Church  
San Antonio, Texas

## Advent 3 - Saturday, December 23

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*“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts....For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”*

Malachi 3:1,6 (Evening Prayer, First Lesson)

In the twilight of the Advent Season our Prayer Book lectionary provides us with an impactful lesson from the Prophet Malachi. This lesson serves as a thread connecting the beginning of the season with the end, for one of the lessons for Morning Prayer on the First Sunday in Advent also lists this passage. In addition, we hear Jesus expound on this passage in the Gospel lesson taken from St Matthew 11:10 on the Third Sunday in Advent when he says, “Behold I send my messenger before thy face.” Our Lord’s version moves Malachi’s words from the category of “a promise made” to the category of “a promise kept.”

In the Gospel lesson Jesus declares the words spoken to Him by the Father directly. God the Father does not say to His Eternal Son, “I will send,” in some future tense, limited by time and space. Instead, the Father says, “I send,” in the eternal present tense that belongs only to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. And when Jesus quotes His Heavenly Father in this way, He is saying, “I AM the Eternal God,” just as certainly as if He were speaking from the burning bush. His hearers are, in fact, hearing the very same voice that Moses heard.

As the prophecy is fulfilled, a person distinct from “my messenger” will purify the sacrifices, the priests and the nations. This “messenger of the covenant” is the Messiah, and the prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus who alone will perform the perfect sacrifice on behalf of His people.

As we have journeyed through this season of anticipation and expectation, we have been drawn through the assigned lessons to a place of clearer and sharper focus. We have seen attention given to John the Baptist who would serve as the forerunner to proclaim the coming of the Lord, and now we have been drawn more narrowly to the One who is to come, Emmanuel, God with us.

Malachi stresses the immutability or unchangeable character of God in verse six to show that His purpose is to bless His elect people. Thus, the sons of Jacob are not destroyed. His coming as our Lord and Savior in the mystery of the Incarnation is for the same purpose: to bless us and save us from our sins which is made possible by His unchangeable character and in His promises made from before creation.

Now with the dawn of the Christmas Season just a little more than a day away we see the focus fully on Christ as the One who will “save his people from their sins.” He will be born as a babe in Bethlehem, but He will be under the shadow of the Cross as He lives out His earthly life.

Our joy and hope are found in Christ who humbles Himself to come as one of us to take the burden of our fallenness upon Himself and to reconcile us to God the Father. Thus, we can be prepared to join with the angelic host and to sing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The Right Reverend David Haines  
Missionary Bishop of Global Partnerships  
Rector of All Saints Anglican Church  
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# Advent 4 - Sunday, December 24

## Christmas Eve

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*“Whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoreth me; and  
to him that ordereth his way aright,  
will I show the salvation of God.”*

Psalm 50:23 (Morning Prayer)

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and marks the last week of Advent and the end of the studies and meditations we began at the beginning of the season. This year the week will only be a day long due to the date of Christmas. It started yesterday at sunset and will end today at sunset when we begin our observance of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On Christmas Eve we begin the joyful celebration of our Lord's first coming among us in his incarnation and we remember the awesome events and all those who witnessed it.

But, before we leave the season of Advent we should look back on it and see if the purpose we went through it was achieved. The purpose of Advent was to not only prepare us to celebrate the first coming of our Lord in His nativity but also to prepare us for our Lord's second coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is a time to examine ourselves as to whether we are ready if He should come back today and have we truly prepared ourselves to receive Him.

St John the Baptist, who is prominent in our lessons today, was sent to prepare the way for Christ. Jesus said of



St. John “For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (Matthew 11:10). St. John did this by proclaiming a message of “repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3) and a need for all to “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8).

Sometimes we forget who the people were that he came to preach his message to. The people he was sent to prepare the way of the Lord for were the religious leaders and people of his day. Some of them had strayed and lost their way of living a life devoted to God and to producing the good fruits of character that are the results of that relationship.

In this busy world full of distractions and influences both good and evil, it is so easy for anyone to stray and lose their way even if just a little bit. That is why during and especially at the end of our Advent studies and meditations, we should examine our lives to ascertain whether or not we may have strayed and lost our way if only a little bit. If so, determine how to correct it and increase our devotion to our Lord and produce the good fruits of Christian character that is pleasing to Him. We should do this “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

The Right Reverend William Perkins  
Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of the Eastern United  
States, Anglican Province of America  
Dean of Florida  
Rector of Saint Mary the Virgin Anglican Church  
Delray Beach, FL

# Christmas Day

## Monday, December 25

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*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,  
which is Christ the Lord.”*

Luke 2:11 (Morning Prayer, Second Lesson)

The greatest story ever told, so simple a child can understand it, and simultaneously so profound the most eminent theologians are still awestruck by its revelation...

...Once upon a time there was living in a village called Nazareth in Palestine a Maiden named Mary, and she loved God more than anything else in the world. She was engaged to a carpenter called Joseph, who also loved God above all things. And one day God sent one of His great Archangels - Saint Gabriel - to see Mary. And this is what he said to her: ‘Hail, Mary! Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.’ And he went on to tell her that God was going to give her a Son, Who should be called the Son of God; and His Name was to be JESUS, because He should save His people from their sins. And Mary said, ‘How shall this be?’ Saint Gabriel said, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold the Handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.’ That means: ‘I am God’s servant, so He can do with me what He thinks best.’

Saint Gabriel knelt before Our Lady because she was now the Mother of Jesus Who is God, and then he went from her.

Mary went at once to see her cousin Elizabeth, because she too was to have a son, who was to tell people about Jesus when they were both grown up; his name was to be John, Saint John the Baptist. When Mary arrived, Saint Elizabeth said, 'Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb' (that means 'blessed is your Child'). So now you know where the first part of the Hail Mary comes from. Christians created the second half a few years later.

Some months afterwards Mary and Joseph, her Protector, had another messenger, and it was not an Angel this time. It was someone who came from King Herod to say that everyone must go to his own town to be counted. When that sort of thing happens nowadays we call it a census. Now, Joseph belonged to the Royal House of David, although he was only a poor carpenter, and his special city was Bethlehem. There he went, taking Mary with him. After a very long and tiring journey - they probably had to walk - they found the city very full. There was no room for them in the inn.

At last, seeing how tired and poor they looked, someone took pity on Mary and Joseph and said, 'I've got no room in my house, but there is a stable cave out at the back where the animals are; if you like you can rest there on the straw.' There, among the dumb animals Joseph made Mary as comfortable as he could. And then in the silence of the night the most wonderful thing since the beginning of the world happened: Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World, was born. Saint Joseph, the Foster-Father, knelt by Blessed Mary's side and worshipped the Holy Babe.

He was hungry and cold; He cried like other babies. The only place where He could lie was in the manger where the cattle usually had their food - although He was God the Son.

He was the King of all kings, and might have been born in a palace with lots of people all knowing about His coming, with everything to make Him comfortable. But no, God wanted Him to be poor, to be born in a stable, to have no comforts and very few people to know about it. Why? Surely because He had come to make up for our sins. He had to suffer for them, and He started to suffer right at the beginning of His life.

There were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flocks that night. And the Angel of the Lord came to them and told them, 'Go quickly to Bethlehem, for there is born to you a Saviour, Christ the Lord.' And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly Host of Angels praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will.' The shepherds had been looking forward and hoping that God would send the promised Saviour quite soon. So when the Angels had gone from them they wasted no time, but came with haste and found the place; and they found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Of course, they did what we should have done: fell on their knees and worshipped their Lord and their God.

We expect they offered Him some small presents on His birthday - they were very poor, so they could not afford much - like the kings who came with their Gold, Incense and Myrrh later on. But we are sure they gave what they could. Perhaps they gave some lamb's wool to

keep the Baby warm, and some milk, and some bread as well.

But the greatest Christmas present and the most valuable was their love. And we can always give Him that as well. It is our love which makes the Babe of Bethlehem radiant with joy.

For Thy first coming as a little Child,  
For Thy last coming to judge the world,  
For Thy coming into our hearts now by Grace,  
Praise and glory be to Thee, O Christ.

And in turn we receive this...

No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

Let us come with grateful hearts to adore and receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of His true Body and Blood, born out of love for us men and for our salvation, on the Feast of His Nativity.

May the Incarnate Lord Jesus, true God and Son of Mary, bless and keep you!

The Most Reverend Chandler Holder Jones  
Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Province of America  
Bishop Ordinary, Diocese of the Eastern United States

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