

Advent Reflections
2016



Advent Journey

The journey through Advent
is a cry in the desert of our lives
for Christ to be our light
deep inside and also shining for all to see!

Joellen Price, PBVM
Artist of Cover Image and Description

Welcoming Advent

Open the door ...
Advent is coming!

Open the door ...
Make room in the inn of your heart.

Open the door ...
Be welcoming and offer hospitality.

Open the door ...
The time of the Savior's birth is near!

Colleen Venter, PBVM Associate

**First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2016**

“Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Romans 13:12

As we journey to the mountain of the Lord’s house of which Isaiah speaks today, what do we need to carry with us on our way? First, the armor of prayer: the hopeful prayer of each new morning, the thanksgiving prayer of each concluding day and all of the “*help!*” prayers in between. We need the armor of preparedness. The climb is not an easy one. We must stay alert and be courageous and persistent. Hardships are inevitable on the journey, and if we’ve tucked the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our backpack, we will not be deterred. The armor of community is a must. We do not and cannot travel alone. We need the care and accountability of community to tame our sword-sharp tongues and renounce the sins of our spears. Our journey begins anew today. May we be blessed to meet Jesus along the path.

**Light your lantern today and inspect your Advent armor.
Prayers: ✓ Virtues: ✓ Hug for a fellow traveler: ✓**

Bernie Graves, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-9
Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

**Monday
November 28, 2016**

“Jesus said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’ The centurion said in reply, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.’” Matthew 8:7-8

Jesus was going to go to the house where the man lay paralyzed to cure him. But the centurion felt unworthy to have Jesus come to his home. If Jesus would only say the word, he believed that his servant would be healed. What great faith he had in Jesus’ healing powers.

When we attend Mass, we say these very same words. Do we have the strong faith that this man did? Or do we need to see it to believe it? How often do we plea for our Lord’s healing power to save us?

So many times we go to Mass and say the prayers, but do we really listen and hear what we are saying? Let us be more attentive to these words, truly believe in them and grow stronger in our faith.

May our Lord Jesus Christ forgive us of our weaknesses and heal us of our wounds.

Darla Budden, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 122:1-9; Matthew 8:5-11

Tuesday
November 29, 2016

“Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide.” Isaiah 11:3

She said her name was Wendy and she was from Canada so she didn't mind the cold weather. When my niece, Wanda, had a “fender-bender” on a slippery Saturday morning in St. Paul, MN, a young woman from “nowhere,” without boots, cap or scarf appeared on the scene and told a shaken, tearful Wanda she would stay with her until the police and her family arrived. No last name, no address, just a gentle presence. Wanda felt “touched by an angel” that icy morning. She didn't *look* like an angel, but there was certainly a bit of mystery in the whole encounter: her “unidentification,” the way she suddenly “appeared” and just as quickly disappeared.

Sometimes, however, our experiences are less “angelic” and we find ourselves making negative judgments. Our responses might be based on speech or “speechisms,” color or creed, attire or attitudes, manners or mannerisms – or merely what *someone said* ... Isaiah offers a model: we must **not judge** by appearances and **certainly not** by hearsay! Yet, how often we've had to *relearn* that lesson?

During this Advent season let us be on *High Alert* as we encounter the “other” in our daily lives - those cloaked in the ordinariness of familiarity, those who move too slowly or walk too quickly, the ones who chatter too much or say too little, laugh too loudly or talk too softly – all who rub us the wrong way. Let us guard our thoughts *and* our speech. All aboard?

Joan Lickteig, PBVM

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Luke 10:21-24

**Wednesday
November 30, 2016**

“The heavens declare the glory of God: the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.” Psalm 19:2-5

Often as I read and reflect on Psalm 19, I experience a sense of joy, as I find myself lost in the beauty of God’s creation, just as I do when I see a beautiful sunrise or sunset. I also experience a sense of joy and closeness to God when a friend sends a text message with a beautiful picture of a sun rise and says, “Just another day along the Mississippi.”

Yet, how quickly and easily the moments fade away as I recall the activities and pressures of daily life; just as the beauty of God’s creation exhibits God’s handiwork so too am I created to reflect the image of God in my daily life.

I love the prayer from Sister William:

**Happy Moments - Praise God
Difficult Moments - Seek God
Quiet Moments - Worship God
Painful Moments - Trust God
EVERY MOMENT - THANK GOD**

May I always remember to thank God for the beauty of creation!

Margaret Anne Kramer, PBVM

Romans 10:9-18; Psalm 19:2-5; Matthew 4:18-22

**Thursday
December 1, 2016**

“Give thanks to the Lord, who is good whose love endures forever.” Psalm 118:1

**“Open the gate of victory. I will enter and thank the Lord. This is the Lord’s own gate, where the visitors enter. I thank you for you answered me. You have been my savior.”
Psalm 118:19-21**

Open the gate of victory. I will enter and thank the Lord. This is my plea. I feel it was meant for me. In June of 2016, I was diagnosed with fourth stage lung cancer. It appears that soon I will be ready to enter the gate of victory. God gave me a very good life, and I have so much for which to be thankful. I thank everyone who has prayed for me and encourage them to continue.*

As we begin Advent, we try to prepare ourselves for the journey. Can we attend more masses and prepare ourselves to enter the gate of victory?

We give thanks to the Lord, whose love endures forever.

Harry Stanton, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 28:1-6; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27
Matthew 7:21, 24, 27

** Harry passed into eternal life on October 11, 2016.*

**Friday
December 2, 2016**

“In a short time the landscape will be an orchard, the deaf will hear the word of the Lord and after shadow and darkness, the blind will see ...” Isaiah 29:17-18

After the fall of Jerusalem and the widespread infidelity of the Israelites, God offered a promise of redemption. Redemption is spoken of in wondrous visuals. The landscape will be an orchard. The deaf will hear God’s word. The blind will see light. The lowly and poor will have joy and rejoice in the Lord.

We, too, find ourselves in need of redemption at times, perhaps from pettiness, from self-absorbed plans, from blindness to God’s will for us.

Yet, there is Good News! We are offered the sweetness and strength of God’s redemption.

Loving and forgiving God, may we open our eyes and see and gratefully accept your gift of redemption.

Louann Doering, PBVM

Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; Matthew 9:27-31

**Saturday
December 3, 2016**

“At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.’” Matthew 9:36-37

Although I feel Pope Francis tries to be a good leader and shepherd to the world’s people, many of us can feel troubled and somewhat helpless in the light of so much violence, hate and poverty today. The quote about how few laborers there are hits especially home with our convents and monasteries admitting few new vocations but we are told to pray. That we can do – and trust that the Good Shepherd, our Lord, and the Holy Spirit will continue to care for us and our world.

Dearest God, I trust you to care for me and all of your creation. Please inspire our young people to become loving laborers for the harvest as brothers, sisters, priests and lay people. Our world needs you. Amen.

Janet Leonard, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 30:19-20, 23-26; Psalm 147:1-6
Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

**Second Sunday of Advent
December 4, 2016**

“Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.” Matthew 3:8-9

Entitlement: the attitude that we deserve to go to the head of the line or always receive special treatment. It’s a turn off when we see it in others. In this passage, Jesus warns the Jews, some of whom boasted that they could count on Paradise thanks to Abraham, against false self-assurances.

Do I too feel similarly entitled? I’ve noticed that capitalism encourages me to think that I deserve to buy anything I want with the money that I have. But the majority of people in the world must struggle to survive on under \$2 each day. What makes me think I deserve so much more? Compassion and empathy heal an entitlement attitude.

Take time today to discern:

Do I feel (falsely) “entitled” about my expenditures?

How can I better share what I have with others in need?

Billie Greenwood, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17
Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Monday
December 5, 2016

“Some men arrived carrying a paraplegic on a stretcher. They were looking for a way to get into the house and set him before Jesus. When they couldn’t find a way in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, removed some tiles, and let him down in the middle of everyone, right in front of Jesus. Impressed by their bold belief, he said, ‘Friend, I forgive your sins.’” Luke 5:18-20

What a great lesson on how to live with love and compassion! This man had been paralyzed all of his life. His friends were there to support and help him by carrying him on a stretcher to a house where Jesus was healing the sick. Hoisting the man to the roof was not an easy task. Once on the roof, they cut a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down and placed him in front of Jesus. I want friends like that. I also want to be that kind of friend to others. To give and receive that kind of friendship we must set aside our own needs and look to the needs of others. In other words, die to self and live in Christ.

We become like the people with whom we spend time. Make Jesus your best friend, get to know him; I mean, really get to know him, not just about him. Visit with him daily. Spend time in quiet with him each day.

Rita Cameron, PBVM

Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 5:17-26

**Tuesday
December 6, 2016**

**“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”
Matthew 18:12-14**

In my own life, I found myself lost for decades. I tried to justify my poor choices by saying it was because of the way I was treated by a family member. After years of being lost, God came in search of me and put me in a situation that I never would have imagined. I was forced to forgive the person who had hurt me throughout my life, by learning to take care of and protect this aging family member until death.

I was grateful to God for finding me and showing me the way. I learned to forgive all the years of hurt that I had ever experienced. In the end, I repented and was restored to fellowship with God. I was the lost and became found.

Are you lost, searching for something in this world? Pray to God so that you may be found and experience his love.

Deb Pic-Deutmeyer, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 96:1-3, 10-13
Matthew 18:12-14

**Wednesday
December 7, 2016**

**“Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened. ...
Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew
11:28-30**

The people of Israel, a pilgrim people, journeyed often tired, stumbling, complaining and arguing among themselves – not unlike us someday. The prophets reminded them over and over that God was faithful, that God journeyed with them.

Jesus repeats the message, “Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened.” There is no promise to take away the yoke or the burden, but there is the promise of care, compassion and mercy as we journey forward.

Loving, merciful God, gift us today with the awareness of those who are weary and troubled. May your compassion and tenderness flow through us and, thus, may our world grow into the LOVE that is you.

Marge Healy, PBVM

Isaiah 40:25-31; Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10; Matthew 11:28-30

**Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Thursday
December 8, 2016**

“Let it be done to me as you say.” Luke 1:38

“Sent ... found favor ... how can this be ... Holy Spirit is with you ... nothing is impossible ... Let it be done to me as you say.”

Mary displays her humanity in this presence. She encounters Divine Energy and is called to not only trust but also surrender – to let her heart be captured by the one who loves her unconditionally. She is invited to turn toward her resistance and fear. In her opening and receiving, this nonlinear and illogical Divine Energy blesses her and all creation.

Today I am aware of my resistance and surrender to Divine Energy birthing through me.

Joetta Venneman, PBVM

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:14;
Ephesians 1:36, 11:12; Luke 1:26-38

**Friday
December 9, 2016**

**“... We played the flute for you, but you did not dance,
we sang a dirge, but you did not mourn.” Matthew 11:17**

What I hear in this gospel is that something just isn't the same. Apparently the flute was playing for dancing and the dirge for mourning, but this didn't happen. Advent is a time for joy in preparation for the celebration of our Lord's birth. Isaiah 48:17 says: "I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is for your good ..." and Psalm 1:6 encourages with: "The Lord watches over the way of the just." The gospel speaks of those not happy with the way things are. Not everyone is in tune with the joys of the season. I had a student in Adult Reading class who told me: "I hate the Christmas season." The suicide rate is up during this time also. What causes this? Is there anything we can do?

**Help me Lord, to serve others where you need me most as
we prepare for the celebration of your birth.**

Mary Irene Stanton, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1:1-4, 6; Matthew 11:16-19

Saturday
December 10, 2016

“Blessed is he (she) who shall have seen you and who falls asleep in your friendship.” Sirach 46:11

Looking for Jesus in our life today can be a challenge. We start out well and then in our plans for the day we get busy and we miss opportunities to bring joy to others as well as to ourselves. The community in the New Testament is a good example as they saw Jesus in one another. Each one of us is special in God’s eyes and he wants us to find him in others as well.

Have I thanked people, blessed them for something they have done recently? It could be a greeting while looking them in the eye, a phone call, writing a note, saying a prayer. Have I made a difference in the lives of other people? Look at the simple, beautiful ways St. Therese of Lisieux and Mother Teresa found Jesus in the smallest ways. Do I continue proclaiming the Gospel by the way I live? The value of each of us is shown in how we witness right here and now. Jesus loves to see us happy as well as having a heart full of joy. Then as the day ends we can rest in God’s friendship and be at peace.

**Take some time to look for Jesus in others today.
Open my eyes, Lord, for this opportunity.**

Dolores Moes, PBVM

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19
Matthew 17:9a,10-13

**Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2016**

**“Those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.”
Isaiah 35:10**

Gaudete Sunday is the “break” in our season of preparation for Christmas. We emphasize the joy of being persons of faith on this day in particular. But what if every day was a day of joy in our faith? Would we share that with others? Would we make it look inviting to be people of faith? Would we be the people who draw others to lives of faith and faithful living? That’s our call in these cold days of winter and in every day.

How will I live in joy today and share that with all those around me?

Bren Connors, PBVM Associate and Former Member

Isaiah 35:1-6; Psalm 146:6-10
James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
Monday
December 12, 2016**

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb (heart) and bear a son, and you shall name him, Jesus.” Luke 1:31

“... betrothed ... troubled ... pondered ... conceived”

These words reflect the spectrum of reality that Mary experienced as she learned of her part in salvation history ... to en flesh the Son of the Most High ... to welcome Jesus to her womb ... to welcome Jesus into her heart.

Similarly, Mary of Guadalupe, is quoted to have spoken to Juan Diego during her appearance to him: “I desire a church in this place where your people may experience my compassion. All those who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows will know my Mother’s heart in this place. Here I will see their tears; I will console them and they will be at peace.”

May your Advent prayer and transformation empower you to conceive in your heart, like Mary of Guadalupe, a spirit of compassion, consolation and peace toward those in your circle of influence.

Jennifer Rausch, PBVM

Zechariah 2:14-17; Judith 13:18-19; Luke 1:26-38

**Tuesday
December 13, 2016**

“I will bless the Lord at all times. Look to him that you may be radiant with joy.” Psalm 34:2-3

Recently, I was sharing with a spiritual friend asking what our life's passion is. She responded, “My passion is to realize within my whole being that God loves me and to respond to that realization by living a joy-filled life. As I recognize that, I know that it will be caught by all those I encounter.” WOW!

How has the Lord loved me and blessed me? How do I respond to God and people with love? Am I radiant with joy because of that love? How so?

Charlotte McCoy, PBVM Associate

Zephaniah 3:9-13; Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 23
Matthew 21:28-32

**Wednesday
December 14, 2016**

**“The disciples of John gave him all this news, and John, summoning two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else?’ When the men reached Jesus they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to you, to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come or have we to wait for someone else?’”
Luke 7:18b-20**

John the Baptist’s question is a great one for all of us, a great question for me. Will I find God in *this* way of praying, or shall I find another, much better way to pray? Am I encountering God in *these* persons, whom I encounter today, or shall I find God in others? Will this book/article be great to read, or will I encounter life’s wisdom in some other one? I am not against the *busqueda*. What would life be without the *search*? Only I don’t want to miss the *encounter* for wondering if there is something better beyond what I am now seeing.

What wonders did God manifest before my very eyes today so that I can truthfully say, “Yes, I’ve seen God today?”

Maura McCarthy, PBVM

Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21b-25; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 7:18b-23

**Thursday
December 15, 2016**

“You have turned my mourning into dancing. You have stripped off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. So my heart will sing to you unceasingly, Yahweh, my God, I shall praise you forever.” Psalm 30:12-13

Some time ago, I received an e-mail from a friend asking for prayers for her newly born grandson who had heart issues and weighed just over one pound. At the end of her request she added that she told God “if he would show up and show off” she would tell the whole world about him. The baby’s heart could not heal itself so surgery was scheduled. The morning before surgery they ran another test and yes, God had shown up! The doctors had no explanation, but his little heart was working and surgery was not needed! At three months that baby went home weighing over seven pounds.

How often do we find ourselves begging God to “show up” for whatever we need? Then when he “shows off” and answers our prayers, how often do we remember ... “Yahweh, my God, I shall praise You forever” ... and then tell the whole world of his powerful love?

Mary Lou Mauss, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 54:1-10; Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13; Luke 7:24-30

**Friday
December 16, 2016**

“John was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light.” John 5:35

This is an amazing time of year. A time filled with many days of celebrating the lives of saints – St. Nicholas, St. Lucy, St. John of the Cross and the list continues. The lives of the saints may inspire us, but their testimony is not enough. Each of these saints gave themselves completely to the Lord. We are called to become so consumed with love that our lives shine and so point others to Christ.

Think about a person that you have known who was truly a burning and shining lamp in whose light you rejoiced. What made this person that burning and shining lamp for you? Their faith? Their commitment? Their compassion? Their strength to love deeply?

Cheryl Demmer, PBVM

Isaiah 56:1-3, 6-8; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 7-8; John 5:33-36

**Saturday
December 17, 2016**

“Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.” Psalm 72:7

As I read these readings, the psalm response immediately grabbed my attention. Justice and peace seem so distant from what we hear and read in the news. We experience violence in surround sound on TV and at our fingertips on social media. Our world is in desperate need of God’s justice and peace, and it’s easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of all the suffering that so many face.

We need the challenging message of Advent now more than ever to “prepare and make ready the way.” We are called to be the heart, hands, and face of Jesus and to work for justice and peace wherever we are and in whatever we are doing. These actions will move us closer to the justice and peace for which we pray.

**O Wisdom of God, guiding creation with power and love:
come teach us the path of justice and peace!**

Annette Kestel, PBVM

Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72:3-4, 7-8, 17; Matthew 1:1-17

**Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2016**

“The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph.” Matthew 1:18-19

Consider a young engaged couple, their tender love for each other. Suddenly everything changes. He discovers she is pregnant. He knows for certain he is *not* the father. Think of his first reactions – anger at being betrayed? Bewildered that she broke a sacred trust? In turmoil over what to do? In spite of everything and because he was a man of good character, he decides to break off the relationship quietly so that she would not be publically humiliated.

We can only imagine his struggle but he hears God’s message: “Go ahead and marry her. This is my doing. Welcome the baby with love and name him ‘Jesus’. He will change the world.” So he married her.

What an example of discernment and trust! What a way to begin a marriage – steeped in unknowing openness and deepest faith!

Mary, Joseph, I pray that the trust and faith you had in God permeate my very life breath. Amen.

*Colleen Vlasisavljevich
PBVM Associate and Former Member*

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-6
Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

**Monday
December 19, 2016**

“I will treat of the mighty words of the Lord; O God, I will tell of your singular justice.” Psalm 71:16

So often we read about the “mighty works” of the Lord, but in this case, Psalm 71 invites us to consider the “mighty words” of the Lord. Today’s Gospel describes Zechariah’s inability to believe what he was hearing from the angel who was trying to tell him how God was acting in his life.

How will you listen for the mighty words of God today?

Who might speak them to you?

How can you offer the mighty words to those you meet?

Joy Peterson, PBVM

Judges 13:2-7; Psalm 71:3-6, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25

**Tuesday
December 20, 2016**

“Ask for a sign from the Lord, your God.” Isaiah 7:11

There once was a song lyric, “Sign, sign, everywhere a sign ... do this, don’t do that, can’t you read the sign?” Sometimes, I think, no Lord I can’t read your signs for me. What are they? Where are they? Then I realize God gives us plenty of signs. Some are apparent, as in giving Ahaz the prophesy of the coming birth of Christ. Some are more subtle signs, as those that come through our loved ones, the kindness of others, the beauty of the earth. These are all signs of God’s presence with us. As we live our daily lives let us look for the signs of God’s loving care for us.

Lord, help me to always be aware of your signs, what they are and where they are.

Yvonne Kisch, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-6; Luke 1:26-38

**Wednesday
December 21, 2016**

“Blessed are you who believed that the Lord’s word would come true!” Luke 1:45

What words did young Mary believe? Rejoice ... full of grace ... the Lord is with you ... do not fear ... with God nothing is impossible...

So many words, written and spoken, are heard by us each day. How does God’s word get through to us? And more importantly, how do we believe that this Word will come true? Thanks to Mary’s listening “The Word was made flesh.”

May I make time in my schedule this day to sit in silence and wait for God’s word to break through.

Paula Schwendinger, PBVM

Song of Solomon 2:8-14
Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Luke 1:39-45

Thursday
December 22, 2016

“I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord.’ She left Samuel there.”
1 Samuel 1:27-28

Fr. Mark Osterhaus always says, “If there is a barren woman in the Bible and God allows her to have a child, that child is going to do something great!” Examples: Sarah had Isaac, Elizabeth had John, and here, Hannah has Samuel. She and Elkanah were unable to have any children, which for Hannah, was considered to be a curse. Hannah had prayed for a long time for a child and had even made the promise to give the child back to God if she could just bear a child. So when Samuel was born, she cared for him, but when he was weaned, keeping her promise, she took him to the temple and left him there to grow in his relationship with God. Samuel became a great prophet.

When we present our children for Baptism, we are, in a sense, giving them back to God. We promise to instruct them and raise them in the faith we profess. How difficult is it for us to let go of our children and believe that God will do something great with them? God heard Hannah’s prayers for her child; He will hear our prayers for our children, too.

Even if our children are grown, do we still try to instruct them in the faith through our example and our prayers?

Karen Bonfig, PBVM Associate

I Samuel 1:24-28; I Samuel 2:1, 4-8; Luke 1:46-56

**Friday
December 23, 2016**

“What, then, will this child be? The hand of the Lord was with him.” Luke 1:66

The neighbors of Elizabeth and Zechariah seem to be very important in this selection. They rejoice with Elizabeth who has given birth to a son, and after the child is named they ask, ‘What will this child be?’ Can we be happy at the good fortune of those around us as the neighbors of Jesus are? As we approach our Christmas gatherings, we will be in situations where we can rejoice, support and love or we can compare, ignore, and be unkind. May we listen with the good of all in our hearts and put aside all judgment as we celebrate this season. Is not the hand of God with everyone we meet?

Let’s decide to greet every person with rejoicing and wonder during this sacred season.

Marilyn Breen, PBVM

Malachi 3:1–4, 23-24; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; Luke 1:57-66

**Saturday
December 24, 2016**

“I’m forever telling everyone how faithful you are. I’ll never quit telling the story of your love - how you built the cosmos and guaranteed everything in it. Your love has always been our lives’ foundation, your fidelity has been the roof over the world.” Psalm 89:2-3

Filled with the roaring of creation, let us go forth restless and disturbed by the senseless exploitation and destruction of the Earth. Let us join together to bring forth a sustainable society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace.

We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future ... *Preamble, Earth Charter*

In what ways am I willing to use my time, talents and energy to protect the cosmos and everything in it?

O God! Let the cosmos (and me) praise your wonderful ways ... Psalm 89:5

Mary Dennis Lentsch, PBVM

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29
Luke 1:67-79

**Solemnity of Christmas
Sunday
December 25, 2016**

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us; not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the baptism of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he lavished on us through Jesus Christ our Savior ...” Titus 3:4-7

Christmas. Gifts. This Christmas, as we gather with loved ones, may we be cognizant of God’s Divine Mercy – an undeserved and endless gift. Paul’s epistle to Titus delivers news of God’s mercy (gift-wrapped in Jesus and un-wrapped in the Holy Spirit) to grace us with hope and eternal life.

How have I experienced this gift and how might I be the face, voice or touch of God’s compassion, love and hope today?

Barbara Ressler, PBVM Associate

Isaiah 62:11-12; Psalm 97:1-3, 11-12
Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:15-20

**Monday
December 26, 2016**

**“As Stephen was being stoned he could be heard praying,
‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” Acts 7:59**

Stephen was being stoned and was heard praying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He even died forgiving his murderers. I can’t imagine myself, if I were having stones hurtled at me, even thinking to pray! I would probably be shouting, “OW, OW, OW!” or “STOP, STOP!” With the pain which that would cause, I don’t even know if I could have presence of mind to pray, or at least, I would just call out, “Help me, God!” Stephen responded as Jesus would have, and did, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

As we age, with the aches and pains of arthritis or any illness, do we pray, “God, I accept this suffering with patience?” Or do we complain and recite our aches and pains to receive sympathy from any who will listen?

Help me, Lord, to accept pains, sufferings and hardships patiently in honor of St. Stephen.

Dolores Zieser, PBVM

Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59; Psalm 31:3-4, 6-8, 17, 21
Matthew 10:17-22

Tuesday
December 27, 2016

“This is what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon ... we speak of the word of life.” 1 John 1:1

In preparing this reflection I was struck by the number of times today’s readings reference sight: what we have **seen** with our eyes ... what we have **looked** upon ... life became **visible** ... we have **seen** and bear witness. (1 John 1:1-4) And from the Gospel: Mary Magdalene **saw** the stone had been moved. The other disciple did not enter the tomb but bent down to **peer** in, and **saw** the wrappings lying on the ground. Simon Peter observed the wrappings and **saw** the piece of cloth which had covered the head not lying with the other wrappings. John **saw** and believed. (John 20:2-8) The Responsorial Psalm tells us that “all people **see** his glory.”

Today’s “seeing” references brought to mind some of the other times when Jesus invited his disciples to notice. Referring to the penitent woman who lavished the feet of Jesus with perfume in Luke 7:44: “Simon, do you see this woman?” In Mark 12:43: “**See** this poor widow who has contributed more than all the others.” Likewise, in the words of Jesus to Thomas: “You believe, Thomas, because you have **seen** me. Blessed are they who did not **see** and yet believe.” (John 20:29)

I end my reflection with a question and a prayer: How important is it to actually see before we believe? Lord, help my unbelief!

Anne McCormick, PBVM

**Wednesday
December 28, 2016**

“God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, ‘We have fellowship with him,’ while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another ... If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.” 1 John 1: 5-7, 9

Our lifetime is a struggle to stay on the path lit with God’s love and mercy, to always move forward with a clear heart and mind with the truth of God’s Word guiding us. On this feast of the Holy Innocents we remind ourselves of the gift of life given to all but especially children. Daily we are called to value and nurture the ‘innocents’.

“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.” 1 John 2: 1-2

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 124:8

Deb Jasper, PBVM Associate

1 John 1:5-2:2; Psalm 124:2-5, 7-8
Matthew 2:13-18

Thursday
December 29, 2016

“The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, ‘Behold, this child is destined for all in Israel ...’”
Luke 2:33-34

Jesus came as joy and light; a revealing light. Do you know the joy of a life that can let go to be that light for others in their darkness? Like Simeon may we open our eyes in grateful amazement for all the interventions in our lives.

“Love is enfleshed everywhere. Everywhere the Holy One is shouting and whispering, ‘Let me love you.’ And all that is asked of us is to receive. In reality, that is our life’s work, (to let God love us). Nothing more, and certainly nothing less.” Judy Cannato

Sharon Kelchen, PBVM

1 John 2:3-11; Psalm 96:1-3, 5-6; Luke 2:22-35

**Friday
December 30, 2016**

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.” Colossians 3:12

On this Feast of the Holy Family, the words taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians give a heartfelt, but challenging description of what family life involves. If we understood and honored “family” in an even broader and more inclusive sense, how could our world be different? “Put on ... compassion, kindness, humility and over all these put on love.” These virtues entrusted to each of our brothers and sisters could change our lives and our world.

Today look deep within and if there is a brother or sister NEAR or FAR from whom you have withheld any of these virtues of love, do something that will change your heart. Make a phone call, write a note, say a prayer and change your attitude.

Janet Stelken, PBVM

Colossians 3:12-21; Psalm 128:1-5; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

**Saturday
December 31, 2016**

“Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound, let the plains be joyful and all that is in them.” Psalm 96:11-12

If the heavens and the earth are rejoicing and the sea resounds and the plains are joyful, then surely we are to be joy-filled as well. Sounds simple enough. Be joyful! But are we? Are you? Am I?

There is much to be joyful about, especially during this season. We have just celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, our truest reason for joy. So right now we all probably are filled with joy. We've celebrated Christmas, probably with family and friends, gifts, and holiday meals. But what happens next week or next month when reality rears its ugly head? Will the joy we feel now sustain us through the coming dark, winter months?

**My Christmas wish for all of us is that we focus on the light that has come into the world, the joy that is Jesus!
May your coming year, 2017 be joy-filled!**

Maureen Utter, PBVM Associate

1 John 2:18-21; Psalm 96:1-2, 11-12, 13; John 1:1-18

**Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God
Sunday
January 1, 2017**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you ...” Numbers 6:24
“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” Galatians 4:6
“All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them
by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things reflecting
on them in her heart.” Luke 2: 18-19**

A Year of Blessing

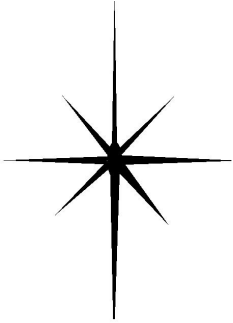
A new year offers us new possibilities on our faith journey. Our readings for this new adventure remind us that we are not alone. As we embark on this spiritual path, let us find inspiration in the company of spirit-filled travelers who have gone before us: the shepherds, the Holy Family, the early Christian community.

Like the shepherds, what stories of faith can I tell?
Like Mary, what deep ponderings are in my heart?
Like the first bearers of Good News, where will the Spirit lead?

God of all blessings, let your face shine upon us. As you are gracious to us, extend your kindness to others through us, that we may journey together in peace.

Diana Blong, PBVM

Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8; Galatians 4:4-7;
Luke 2:16-21





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