



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent (A)
December 4, 2022

Creating God's Kingdom

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

At times, God's presence among us is so unspectacular that we need someone else to point it out—someone with a loud voice. That seems to have been the role of John the Baptist. His lifestyle and his message certainly caught everyone's attention. But when he caught their attention, he directed it away from himself to the kingdom of heaven.

He called it a kingdom because that was the government people of his time knew. (Jesus, too, often spoke of his kingdom.) However, the kingdom John referred to is not one of military power

and privilege but a "peaceable kingdom," where animals that are normally feared as predators live with each other in peace. A beautiful picture, but is it a possibility or just fantasy? The people believed that some day one would be born who would rule this way, thus enabling them to become a genuine peaceable kingdom. This kingdom would not be made of animals but of women and men of different races, cultures, and beliefs; women and men who would recognize each other's God-given uniqueness and would create genuine unity from this diversity.

John the Baptist declared that this kingdom "is at hand." Is it? Do we strive to live peacefully with the great diversity of people of our world? Or are we smug as we proclaim: "We have Abraham as our father" (Matthew 3:9), so we are right and you are wrong. The people of John's time should have known better. We should, too. John cries out to them—and to us: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). +

*Do we strive to
live peacefully with
the great diversity
of people of our world?*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 11:1-10

He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide fairly for the land's afflicted.

Romans 15:4-9

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus.

Matthew 3:1-12

[John the Baptist said,] "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

A Word from Pope Francis

God changes the desert into a sea, parched ground into springs of water....God turns his gaze to wherever sadness and loneliness abound....He comes to us in difficult situations; he fills our inner emptiness that makes room for him; he visits our existential deserts. The Lord visits us there.

Homily, Athens, December 5, 2021



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How open are you to people of different faiths, races, or nations?
- What can you do to make real the peaceable kingdom of heaven?

The Deeper Dramas of Our Relationships

By Fr. John F. Kavanaugh

It is first and foremost in our relationships, our families, our friends, that God is encountered, that faith is given flesh, that our theories of justice are tested out, that our prayer is made real, that dreams are actualized.

Even the great mystic teacher St. Teresa of Ávila insisted on that truth: when people came inquiring about the heights of holy prayer, she would ask how their relationships were going. And the great skeptic Freud knew it, too: the stage of the ordinary, of the family, was where the deepest dramas are played out.

Our most profound sufferings, our greatest heroics, our most significant encounters with God are here with these people we know and love, in their goodness, in their weakness. Where else do we most intimately encounter what Paul calls the “requirements” of love: those crucibles of patience, the winnowing of humility, the courage of forgiveness, the comfort of kindness?

It is easy to love humanity. It is quite another thing to love this particular family, who is so close to me, so like me. But when it happens, there is glory, even if the sword pierces the heart.

- A man entrusts his only son, merely twenty-eight but at the gate of death, to the arms of God.
- A woman sees every one of her brothers and sisters die—and she trusts.



- A young son goes to his parents with news that is first sad, and then is transformed, like a butterfly, into soaring grace.
- A spouse forgives the deep wound of infidelity.
- A child gives the mother a flower, so unexpected, for the first time.
- A husband cares for a wife, who has multiple sclerosis, for twenty years. After she parts from this world, he himself, suddenly unmoored in the abyss of Alzheimer's, is cared for by the daughter he once had to forgive.
- A mother still stands by with her teenager who seems neither kind nor appreciative.

It is all here, in our homes, in the pews of our churches, in our friends, in our families.

Here is the holy ground. Here is the face of God, the smile shining upon us, the kindly gaze upon us. These are arks of the covenant. These are the holy of holies if we only look, like Simeon; if we only see, like Anna; if only, like Mary, we take time to ponder it all in our hearts. +

Excerpted from *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Advent and Christmas* by Fr. John F. Kavanaugh, SJ, available from Liguori Publications. Visit Liguori.org to learn more and review our list of *Daybreaks* authors, including Fr. Ron Rolheiser, Sr. Dianne Bergant, Fr. Daniel Horan, and others.

The stage of the ordinary, of the family, is where the deepest dramas play out.

**PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, so that by our words and our actions we may point the way to you, we pray—Be born in us, be born in our world.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 5–10

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Is 35:1–10 / Lk 5:17–26

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 40:1–11 / Mt 18:12–14

Wednesday, Saint Ambrose:
Is 40:25–31 / Mt 11:28–30

Thursday, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Gn 3:9–15, 20 / Eph 1:3–6, 11–12 / Lk 1:26–38

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 48:17–19 / Mt 11:16–19

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Sir 48:1–4, 9–11 / Mt 17:9a, 10–13

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent (A)
December 11, 2022

The Splendor of God

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

“Here is your God!” Who wouldn’t run to see this marvel? Isaiah tells us what to look for: nature will explode with excitement and splendor, and the hardships of life will no longer hold us captive. Is this really possible, or is it merely hopeful poetry? Jesus tells the disciples of John the Baptist that it’s possible. In fact he, Jesus, is the one who has ushered in the kingdom of heaven. Since that is true, why don’t you and I see it?

The reading from James sheds light on this. There is something wondrous about earth bringing forth “precious fruit” (James 5:7). Our understanding

of how the development and emergence of fruits occur does not make the fact of natural growth any less wondrous. Farmers know this well. They also know that such growth will occur only when human labor cooperates with the laws of nature designed by God. In other words, the farmer provides the labor while God provides the life-giving sun and rain.

If our world does not resemble Isaiah’s astonishing portrait or the healing that Jesus was able to accomplish, might it be that we have not done what we can to remedy the hardships of life that hold so many captive? When God enters our lives, he provides us with the power we need to change our world, but we must be willing to allow that power to work through us. If we are open to God in our midst, our world will be rich with life and healing, and everyone will know that God is really here. +

A Word from Pope Francis

Advent tells us that it is not enough to believe in God: it is necessary to purify our faith every day. It is a matter of preparing ourselves to welcome not a fairy-tale character, but the God who challenges us....The Child who lies in the manger has the face of our brothers and sisters most in need.

Angelus, Rome, December 15, 2019



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God...he comes to save you.

James 5:7–10

You too must be patient....because the coming of the Lord is at hand

Matthew 11:2–11

The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

*When God enters our lives,
he provides us
with the power we need
to change our world.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- In what ways might you enrich the life of another?
- What can you do to heal the broken relationships in your life?

The Miracle that Summons Us

By Barbara Hughes

I've always been a morning person. It's possible that my body clock was genetically programmed to rise with the morning sun, but more than likely it was the demands of a busy life that would awaken me during the predawn hours. But regardless of the genesis, somewhere along the road to adulthood, the early-morning hours became sacred.

As the size of our family increased, so did the need for my holy hour with God. I might spend the time reading Scripture, praying the rosary, or simply pouring out my heart to God. How I spend the time has become less important than entering the sacred space where I meet the person I truly am: a beloved child of God, not because of anything I do, but because of who God is. Knowing this helps keep the past in right perspective, allows me to celebrate the present, and prepares me for the day ahead. Watching and waiting during the time before the sun rises remains a guilt-free luxury, not so different from the season of Advent.

The way I see it, Advent is to Christmas as dawn is to daylight, an occasion for humble expectation and joyful celebration when time seems still. It heralds the rising of the Son from the night of sin, inviting Christians to ponder the mystery of Christ's threefold coming: in history, with us now, and in anticipation of his Second Coming.

Such a regal liturgical season calls for purple vestments, greenery, and the lighting of candles. Transcending the



barriers of time that once held the world in bondage, Advent calls forth age-old stories about Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah. No longer distant figures from the past, these saints bid hearts to prepare for the birth that is ever ancient, ever new.

During the predawn days before Christmas, the communal celebration becomes personal when Mary's *fiat* invites me to say yes to God and when Elizabeth's greeting challenges me to see Jesus in the face of a weary salesclerk. When life's events rob my soul of peace, Joseph reminds me to trust God, and when self-doubt threatens to steal my identity as a child of God, Zechariah invites me to sit in silent prayer and breathe in love's miracles.

Some have called Christmas a magical season, but there's nothing magical about God becoming man. The Incarnation is a mystery and the miracle that summons Christians to receive the Infant God anew, for once again a new day is dawning.

As the beloved of God, we are being transformed. Ever mindful of his coming, we prepare for the long-awaited birth. Joyfully, we acknowledge the presence of Christ with us here and now, even as we watch and pray, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." +

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Some have called Christmas a magical season, but there's nothing magical about God becoming man.

**PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, so that every person on this earth may know they are loved, we pray— Be born in us, be born in our world.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 12–17

Monday, Our Lady of Guadalupe:
Zec 2:14–17 or Rev 11:19a; 12:1–6a,
10ab / Lk 1:26–38 or Lk 1:39–47

Tuesday, St. Lucy:
Zep 3:1–2, 9–13 / Mt 21:28–32

Wednesday, St. John of the Cross:
Is 45:6c–8, 18, 21c–25 / Lk 7:18b–23

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Is 54:1–10 / Lk 7:24–30

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 56:1–3a, 6–8 / Jn 5:33–36

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)
December 18, 2022

He Is One of Us

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

The Incarnation means God is one of us. He is made of our flesh and blood; he laughs, sings, and loves people. Though we believe he is God, he is still one of us. We can choose him to be on our team, trusting he will play to win.

When identifying ourselves, we normally tell others what we do. Societies like the one to which Jesus belonged usually identified themselves by tracing ancestry. As Isaiah tells us today, Jesus belonged to the house of David. Paul says that he was of David “according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3). The Gospel identifies Joseph as a “son of David” (Matthew 1:20). Since Jesus was considered Joseph’s legal son, he

also was a “son of David.” Joseph is told that the child will be called Emmanuel, which means “God is with us” (Matthew 1:23). Thus, Incarnation means God is with us in a unique way in this man who is one of us. The Incarnation also gives extraordinary dignity to material creation, of which we are all a part and of which he is a part as well, for he is one of us. In other words, Emmanuel (God with us) is a Child of earth.

Like Joseph, we cannot fully comprehend what has happened. We can only stand with him in awe as this wondrous mystery unfolds before us. As we await Christmas, we wait for him to appear. When he comes, we will be amazed to see that he is really one of us. +

A Word from Pope Francis

Joseph trusts God totally.... This unshakable trust in God that enabled him to accept a humanly difficult...situation. Joseph understands, in faith, that the child born in Mary’s womb is not his child, but the Son of God, and he, Joseph, will be [the] guardians.

Angelus, Rome, December 22, 2019



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 7:10-14

The Lord himself will give you a sign.

Romans 1:1-7

Through [Jesus Christ] we have received the grace of apostleship.

Matthew 1:18-24

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”

*Though we believe
Jesus is God,
he is still one of us.*



- How does knowing that Jesus is one of us make a difference in your life?
- What religious sentiments fill your mind and heart as we approach Christmas?

What the World Needs

By Emily Blasik

As corny as it may sound, the last two months of the year are my favorites out of the twelve. From the start of November on, it's as if something changes in the air.

The change is subtle, but I start to see it everywhere: I see it on early-morning walks before the sun has fully risen, when the grass is wet beneath my feet, and the weather is cool enough even in the South to warrant a cup of hot cocoa.

I see it on the face of every young child in anticipation of Santa's arrival. I feel it driving to work with the radio turned up, each song chanting like a countdown of the time before Christmas.

I relish it in the window displays of my favorite city storefronts.

People are nicer this time of year. They seem to be more patient and less bogged down by the weight of their world. And it's been my experience that even those who claim to hate Christmas music or the cold or the other trappings of the season can't help but smile a little brighter come December.

But why? What is it about this season that makes us a little giddy, despite ourselves? For me, it's the collective anticipation that springs to life in everyone I encounter. As a society,



holidays tend to captivate us, so we plan and prepare tirelessly. We love it because it's exciting to have something to look forward to. The stockings are hung on our mantles, the gifts are bought and wrapped with care, the cookies are baked and decorated—all a foretaste of and ways to celebrate what's ahead.

Our celebrations and holiday traditions hold deep meaning. For us, as Christians, who recognize the importance of this holiday season, the joy simply can't be contained. And it shouldn't be! It's meant to be shared. Christmas carols and cakes are great, but the news of our Savior's birth is enough to change us all, believers and nonbelievers alike. As a community in need of hope and light and love, we await his precious coming like a child awaits Christmas morning—with anxious hearts and sleepless eyes—because we know it's what this world needs most.

So light your candles. Prepare your homes. Loudly sing the hymns of Advent. Be joyful and anticipate the coming of Christ with all you have. Is there a better reason to celebrate? +

This article is from *Liguorian*, a bimonthly magazine published by the Redemptorists. To subscribe or give a gift subscription, go to Liguorian.org or call 866-848-2492.

Next week our churches will fill with those who don't come regularly, sometimes referred to as Christmas and Easter (C&E) Catholics. In one parish, just before the collection, the pastor suggested that those who were sitting change places with those who were standing. (He even offered his seat in the sanctuary!) Make the strangers welcome. Maybe they'll come back.



Lord Jesus, so that the world may put away the weapons of war and embrace the ways of peace, love, and holiness, we pray—Be born in us, be born in our world.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 19–24

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66

Saturday, Advent Weekday (Morning):
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79

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Bringing Home the Word

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) (A)

December 25, 2022

The Gift that Gives Forever

By Ron Rolheiser, OMI

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord” (Luke 2:10–11).

The fact of a savior born for us does not bring us immediate festive joy. Our world remains wounded; wars, selfishness, and bitterness linger. Our hearts remain wounded; pain lingers. For a Christian, just as for everyone else, there will be incompleteness, illness, death, senseless hurt, broken dreams, cold, hunger, lonely days of bitterness, and a lifetime of longing.

The Incarnation does not promise heaven on earth. It promises heaven in heaven. Here on earth, it promises us something else—God’s presence in our lives. This presence redeems because knowing that God is with us is what ultimately empowers us to give up bitterness, to forgive, and to move beyond cynicism and bitterness. When God is with us, then pain and happiness are not mutually exclusive, and the agonies and riddles of life do not exclude deep meaning and deep joy.

We need to celebrate Christmas heartily. Maybe we won’t feel the same excitement we once felt as children—when we were excited about tinsel, lights, Christmas carols, and special gifts and special food. But something more important is still available, namely the sense that God is with us in our lives, in our joys as well as in our shortcomings.

The word was made flesh. That is an incredible thing. It should be celebrated with tinsel, lights, and songs of joy. If we understand Christmas, then carols will flow naturally from our lips. +

This article is an excerpt from the *Daybreaks* series, published by Liguori Publications for the seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. Fr. Ron Rolheiser has authored several in this series of seasonal devotionals. To learn more and review our complete list of *Daybreaks* authors, visit Liguori.org.

A Word from Pope Francis

The power of this Child, Son of God and Son of Mary, is not the power of this world, based on might and wealth; it is the power of love. It is the power that gives new birth, forgives sin, reconciles enemies, and transforms evil into good. It is the power of God.

URBI ET ORBI, ROME,
DECEMBER 25, 2019



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 52:7–10

All the ends of the earth can see /
the salvation of our God.

Hebrews 1:1–6

[God] spoke to us through a son,
whom he made heir of all things
and through whom he created the
universe.

John 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14

The light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness has not overcome it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What blessings have I received today?
- How can I be a blessing to someone else?

The Gift of Love and the Value of Thanks

By Paige Byrne Shortal

Did you come to church today to please someone else? Perhaps your parents or grandparents or your spouse? Whether you came willingly or under pressure, I hope I'm not being presumptuous when I acknowledge your gift. Coming to church to make someone else happy is an act of love, and you might be giving them their favorite Christmas present.

I'm a convert and find myself fascinated by people who grew up in the Church and then stopped going to Mass. I tend to ask them a lot of personal questions: What takes the place of church for you? Who do you pray to? What do you use as a guide when you make moral choices? If you have children, how will you teach them right from wrong? Who (or what) will you turn to if you are suffering or someone you love is suffering? What gives you meaning and purpose in this life?

Paul Tillich said there are no atheists; that we all make something or someone our god. We must just make sure our god is one who is worthy of the investment of our lives. Today the Christian community celebrates the birth of God, who promises an abundant return on our investment.

I've learned that it's possible to grow up going to church and still not know much about Jesus. A priest friend admitted he didn't really know Jesus until he was in the last years of preparing for ordination. He decided he'd better do



something about it so he sat down and read the Gospel of Matthew straight through. I decided I wanted to do the same. Be warned! This is life-changing stuff.

On a lighter note, here's a true story from my husband's family. There were two older relatives who attended Midnight Mass after many years away from the Church. One whispered, "Hey, that's a woman reading up there." And the other responded, "Yeah, and either that's English or my Latin is better than I thought."

After my oldest had been on his own for a while, he called one night to tell me he had discovered he could not sit down to a nice meal without saying Grace. He

didn't want to say the traditional "Bless us, O Lord..." but he did feel the need to say "thank you."

Later, a month or so after Christmas, I began to get the calls: "Did he get the package, the check? I haven't heard from him." So I called him and suggested that while thank-you notes did require more organization than exists in the lives of most young bachelors, they are part of a "Grace Way of Life." You don't eat thanks, wear it, use it, or spend it before you say it—"thank you"—to the giver.

What do I want my last words to be? Not "Give me more!" or "Not fair!" or "No!" I would like to be the kind of person whose last words are simply: "Thank You."

Merry Christmas. +

***On Christmas, we celebrate
the birth of God, who
promises an abundant
return on our investment.***

**PRAYER**

***Lord Jesus, so that there may
be peace among the nations,
within communities and families,
and in our hearts,
we pray—Be born in us,
be born in our world.***

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 26–31

Monday, St. Stephen:
Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59 / Mt 10:17–22
Tuesday, St. John:
1 Jn 1:1–4 / Jn 20:1a, 2–8
Wednesday, Holy Innocents:
1 Jn 1:5–2:2 / Mt 2:13–18

Thursday, Octave of Christmas:
1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35
Friday, Holy Family: Sir 3:2–6, 12–14 or
Col 3:12–21 or 3:12–17 / Mt 2:13–15, 19–23
Saturday, Octave of Christmas:
1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

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