



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Behold,
I am
bringing you
good news
of great

joy

Reflections on the Season of Advent
2022

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Sunday, November 27

Luke 21:25-28

Predictions of worldly distress, calamity, and destruction? In my church tradition we intentionally read scripture passages announcing such end-time events at the beginning of Advent. In this passage, Jesus, echoing the prophets, tells us that there will be “signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars” (21:25) and that the nations will be “confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves” (21:25). This distress is cosmic: “for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (21:26). The message is clear: life as we know it will come undone. The entire cosmos is being disrupted.

Advent (*adventus*, Lt.) means come to, arrive. The coming of God to dwell among us in the flesh is the first coming. Scripture also witnesses to the future coming of Christ, the second coming. Here Jesus is the “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (21:27). My church tradition has us begin Advent with the second coming and its cosmic Christ rather than with the babe in the manger.

Why do we begin at the end? Why do we read passages like Luke 21 during the first several weeks of Advent? Because the beginning already contains the end and the end reveals that the beginning, as humble as it is, is nonetheless full of fierce power and glory. Who is the defenseless, weak babe whom angels and magi laud and honor? It is the very One who will go to the cross and grave, thwarting the powers of evil and sin forevermore. Who is the little One whom we worship with songs, raising our lighted candles? It is the very One who consummates God’s reign in heaven and on earth. We read about the end first to know what we celebrate at Christmas: the redemption of all creation. What is being undone by this redemption? Anything that is not in keeping with God’s righteous realm. Therefore at all times, in every situation, through any duress, we heed the call with joy: “stand up and raise your heads, because redemption is drawing near” (21:28).

– Rev. Dr. Jennifer L. Lord
*The Dorothy B. Vickery Professor of
Homiletics and Liturgical Studies*



Monday, November 28

Matthew 3:1-6

There is so much preparation that our society expects this time of year. Prepare the Christmas list, prepare the house, prepare the tree, and prepare for the family to visit. It's easy to mishear John the Baptist's words, "prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight" as a call to "Prepare for Christmas." As if John the Baptist, eating his locusts and wearing his camel-skin clothing, calls out in the wilderness to be sure we have selected the perfect gifts for each person on our Christmas list, have prepared an elegant feast for twelve, and have our home perfectly decorated with twinkle lights aglow and chestnuts roasting on the fire.

Perhaps we mishear John the Baptist's call to "prepare the way of the Lord" because wrapping a gift and preparing a pie feels easier than the work of repentance. John the Baptist calls us to "prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight." This type of preparation requires us to consider how, and if, our lives reflect the grace and mercy of God. This type of preparation requires us to repent of the ways that we have fallen short in our love of God and neighbor and then reconcile ourselves with God and others. This type of preparation goes well beyond the trappings of a beautiful Christmas dinner and into our daily habits and practices.

Amid the preparation of the Christmas list and the Christmas meal, let us prayerfully prepare our hearts and lives for the gift of Christ. As we pray this Advent season, ask God to increase our love for others. May we prayerfully repent of our sins against God and neighbor so that our hearts are ready to receive the joyous gift of Christ this Christmas and prepared to live as those who share his love and mercy in this and every season.

Amen.



– Rev. Dr. Sarah Allen (MDiv'07, DMin'19)
*Director of Ministerial Formation
and Advanced Studies*

Tuesday, November 29

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, are advancing on Jerusalem. The streets of Jerusalem will soon be filled with the blood of her people (33:4-5) and the prophet imprisoned by King Zedekiah (33:1). Yet now, amid catastrophe, the prophet speaks words of promise! “I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land” (33:15). In the previous chapter, he has purchased a piece of land, a foolish thing to do in a country soon to be conquered by invading armies. Nevertheless, he has purchased the land as a pledge, as earnest of God’s redemption. In chapter 33, the prophet speaks of the coming restoration. In the midst of impending doom, a sign of hope is enacted. There will come a time in Judah when “there shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride” (33:10-11).

In a recent art installation featuring works from women of color, Letitia Huckaby portrays a ten-year-old black girl holding an enormous sign above her small frame that simply reads, “Enough!” A closer look reveals that the scene is painted onto a cotton sack which immediately evokes painful memories of slavery, racism, and oppression. The painting expresses sadness and anger too deep for words. And yet, a close observer will also notice that the girl is wearing a pink ballet tutu. Suddenly, the art becomes more ambiguously pointed toward hope. We yearn to see the girl break out in dance, a pirouetting celebration of her young life and its blessed goodness. The work is ambiguously titled “Sugar and Spice.”

This moment in our history is shadowed by wars, poverty, injustice, environmental degradation, and division. Like the doom forecasted by Jeremiah and the exasperation expressed by Letitia Huckaby, we, too, live amid very real suffering unto despair. And yet, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, there is dancing afoot that promises to take up all of creation into its gracious rhythm. A green branch has sprouted from a dead tree; a conquered prophet has bought land; a little girl wears a tutu as the music swells to a crescendo.

– Rev. Dr. David F. White
The C. Ellis and Nancy Gribble Nelson
Professor of Christian Education



Wednesday, November 30

James 5:7-8

While Advent takes place in early winter, here in Central Texas, it is still a growing season with our year-round sunny conditions. While I am not a farmer, I have known the patience required while waiting for crops to grow, or at least the small fruits that we receive from our pomegranate and lemon trees. These fruits begin long before their time to harvest—first as flowers, and once pollinated, the flowers fall off, leaving a bud that grows and swells with time. It is not just time that they need; rain is especially important. This passage in James points to farmers waiting patiently for the “early and the late rains.” You need both to have a good harvest. The early rains help the plant produce the flowers that must be pollinated, and the late rains help the fruit to swell with juices.

This is our first year to have Meyer lemons, a particularly sweet kind of lemon. When we first planted the tree, it languished in the heat and dry weather. It loves lots of water and prefers the morning sun and afternoon shade. It survived the freezes of the winter, but by early summer it still seemed to struggle. It had no blossoms at all, which would mean another year of no lemons. So I dug it up and moved it into a pot with good organic soil, brought it under an awning to protect it from the worst of the sun’s rays, and tended to it with a watering can. The results were seen quickly. New green leaves shot out, and tiny flowers began to appear. With help from the bees of the air, we soon had five pollinated blossoms that turned into small fruits. Then we just had to wait. Over the long hot summer, we continued to water the lemon tree in its little pot. The little green buds grew but stayed green for months. Then, just as summer came to an end, in the first week of fall, the first fruit turned yellow. We had our first lemon! The waiting was over.

Caring for the plants that nourish us, relying on the insects that pollinate our crops and the rain that falls from the sky, we learn the patience that invites us into the fullness of time and the joy of the Lord.



– Rev. Dr. Carolyn B. Helsel
*Associate Professor in The Blair R. Monie
Distinguished Chair in Homiletics*

Thursday, December 1

Luke 1:26-33

Sometimes when I need something quickly that I failed to ask for in advance, I will enter another staff member's office and say something like, "Have I told you how awesome you are lately?" I'm buttering them up for the big ask. Has anyone ever approached you that way? That feeling must have been how Mary felt in this scripture. "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Now, that is a line if I ever heard one. Mary must have recognized it as a line, too, because she "was greatly troubled by his words and wondered what kind of greeting this must be."

Gabriel uses his line as an opening to ask Mary to do something—to be the mother of the Savior of the world. I know that the Bible does not report Gabriel's statement as a question, but Mary answers him as if she has an option in the situation. "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

A seminary professor pointed this out to me saying that God's nature is to allow humans to choose whether or not to follow the calling or purpose God has for their life. Could that mean that Mary could have said "no"? Yes, I believe it does. But, she didn't. God places the future of the world in the hands of a young girl named Mary who was probably thirteen or fourteen at the time. Can you imagine a seventh-grade girl being the mother of the Savior of the world? Mary's faith led her to affirm and accept God's call on her life to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

As you listen for good news of great joy this season, listen for how God is calling you. What purpose does God have planned for you?

Will you have the faith to say like Mary, "I am the Lord's servant, let it be with me as you have said."

May you know the deep joy of responding to God's call on your life.

– Rev. Dietrich "Deech" Kirk
*Executive Director, Center for
Youth Ministry Training*



Friday, December 2

Jeremiah 29:11

For human thriving, hope is as necessary as food, water, and oxygen. I think that's one reason that Barack Obama's campaign tag line of hope and change was so appealing to many voters. We end 2022 in the midst of many difficulties that do not give us cause for hope. You know the list: division in domestic politics (and within families), an unprovoked war in Ukraine that has global repercussions, the ongoing crisis of mass incarceration for African Americans, the effects of climate change, and all the rest.

The good news from God in today's verse is that God is on the side of our flourishing, not our demise. God's goal is for our good. What is the shape of that hope? In Christ we come to understand that this hope isn't primarily a singling out of a few of us for good fortune. God isn't picking the winners of the next Power Ball lottery drawing. No, the shape of Christian hope begins with the assurance that in life and in death we belong to God.

Because of that foundation, Christian hope gives us energy to work for the everyday welfare of our neighbors. As I get older, I find myself wondering about the shape of the world when my grandchildren become adults. If present trends continue, it is easy to conclude that the general level of human welfare in the future will be worse than it is today. But hoping in God nudges us to move beyond fatalism and to try to build a future that sustains human dignity for everyone's grandchildren. Now, there might be many motivations to combat sea-level rise and social injustice—including my own self-interest. But Christians are believers in a particular kind of hope. It's rooted in what God has done and in God's promises to us. We may not perceive the details of God's plans, but we cling to God's promised future. And we feel God tugging back. And so we hope.



– Rev. Dr. Timothy Lincoln
*Assistant Dean for Planning,
Research Professor in Theological Education,
and Director of The Mary B. and Robert J.
Wright Learning and Information Center*

Saturday, December 3

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

The beginning verses of the eleventh chapter of the book of Isaiah were clearly intended to give the people of God hope for a better tomorrow. Although the exact time/year these passages were written is disputed, the description of Israel as a “stump” implies a period of decline and decay. The great family tree of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has been felled. Nothing but a shallow, rotting stump was left to bear witness to the glory of years gone by. And the future forecast looked grim.

To those forsaken people the prophet proclaims good news, “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” New life is coming, and it will grow out of the very carcass of what once was. Isaiah casts a vision for the coming of God’s peaceful reign. He envisions a time when wrongs will be made right, outcasts shall be welcomed in, enemies will recline together as siblings, and the whole earth “will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.”

Each year at Christmas we are reminded that God has not forsaken us. Our days may be filled with uncertainty and grim predictions. Yet, in the birth of our savior, God’s work of establishing a world of justice, righteousness, and peaceful coexistence has begun. Most surprisingly, this new era is not ushered in by political dictates nor conquering armies. Instead, a child is born, quite inauspiciously, in an obscure location, to average and ordinary parents.

Some days it is difficult not to be overwhelmed by the barrage of bad news streaming into our ears from every media outlet imaginable. Do not be fooled. God’s plan for the redemption of all creation is unfolding in mysterious and majestic ways all around us ... “and a little child shall lead them.”

– Rev. Dr. Al Krummenacher
Director of Development



Sunday, December 4

Luke 1:46-55

Kathleen Norris once observed that Protestants too often think about Mary only during Advent, setting a figure of her in the Nativity when they put up the Christmas tree and packing her up on January 6th to wait another year. When we talk about Mary at Christmas, we often fixate on the possibility or impossibility of virgin birth, missing the bigger miracle: God enters the world in and through an ordinary human being. This says something amazing about God, but it also says something about us. It says we—as ordinary human beings—participate in God’s saving work.

Mary submits to Gabriel’s announcement, but she is not a passive recipient of a command. She actively accepts who she is called to be and is set free to be her most creative self. She immediately springs to action, traveling to see her pregnant cousin and engaging in her tell-tale “pondering” theological reflection with joy and vision. While the proud act according to “the imagination of their own hearts,” Mary’s imagination comes by way of the Spirit, and she is able to risk believing that the impossible promises of God will be accomplished, for God makes the impossible possible. Mary joins her sister-ancestor Miriam in a song of praise that celebrates the triumph of God over human power-mongers. Her declaration that God has “brought down the powerful from their thrones” mirrors Miriam’s jubilant recounting of how God ended the Israelite’s enslavement by throwing the Egyptian horses and riders into the Red Sea (Ex. 20:21).

What if we all lived like Mary? What if we learned to listen for the Word of God and to obey it? We would then be free, as she was, to join in God’s on-going work of reconciliation not as mere vessels, but as creaturely creators. We—ordinary people—would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear the Good News of Jesus to all the world, and the world would be filled with joy.



– Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Rigby
The W.C. Brown Professor of Theology

Monday, December 5

Ephesians 2:11-22

I grew up a “third-culture kid,” born in Los Angeles, but raised in Germany around United States Army bases. We had all the American culture we could want on base—football, proms, even Burger King—but as a civilian family, we lived “on the economy,” in a home rented from a German family, with German neighbors. A 2016 BBC article describes third-culture kids as belonging “everywhere and nowhere.” I love Germany, but am not of it. For that matter, I have enormous respect for the military, but am not of it, either. When people ask where I’m from, the first reaction they get is a long pause as I decide how long of an answer they seem prepared to hear. I’m sure children of international workers, immigrants, diplomats, and missionaries can relate!

Today’s reading sparked these memories as Paul invites the Gentiles to become third-culture kids in this new spiritual reality. They are not of Israel, but they are now becoming part of God’s body, God’s people. They were outsiders, and now they are insiders. They were far, and now they are near. There used to be two groups, but now there is one group. Can you imagine the growing pains this early church must have experienced? Different cultures and religious traditions gathered under one roof to break bread and share stories of Jesus. I wonder how much of the language and liturgy they understood. I wonder what good news they brought with them that broadened theological understanding. I wonder what unlikely friendships were forged in this new blended community.

As Christians we have the pleasure and challenge of living on these margins—we belong everywhere and nowhere. We can exist at work and among our neighbors, but our ultimate identity isn’t in those places. We are of the Body of Christ, part of God’s household, citizens with the saints, even as we go about all the ordinary tasks of this world. How today, will you bring God’s reality into your everyday life? Where will you see the inbreaking of God today?

– Rev. Sarah Gaventa
Dean of Students



Tuesday, December 6

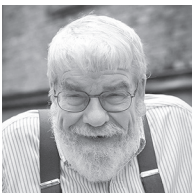
Luke 1:57-79

One summer, when I was barely a teenager, I started reading through Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's *The Story of the Bible*. My family was staying with my grandparents, who did not have a television and whose library was meager at best. I had read through my grandfather's collection of Horatio Alger novels and other assorted boyhood books whose heroes had adventures that would be forever beyond me, and all that was left was the aforementioned Hurlbut and a few decades' worth of *National Geographic* that as far as I could tell had never been opened. So I went with Hurlbut.

I'd like to say that it changed my life. I don't think it did. But I liked all the battles and fights in the Old Testament; the New seemed pale and dull by comparison. War, I thought, was much more interesting than sermons on mountains.

That was childish, but I was a child. Now, sixty years later, I find peace much more interesting than war—much more interesting and much more elusive. There seem to always be wars. Peace is harder to come by. So I find Zechariah's prophecy a source of comfort and hope: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1: 78-79).

Human beings do not seem to have much difficulty in finding ways to justify war. Peace is more difficult. It seems that we have to be taught. We need a guide—a guide which God has provided. So even when the night seems darkest, with violence and strife all around, the promised dawn is coming, and we can wait in hope.



– Rev. Dr. David W. Johnson
*Associate Professor Emeritus of Church
History and Christian Spirituality*

Wednesday, December 7

Matthew 12:14-21

This Advent passage, coming in the middle of Jesus's healing ministry, describes Jesus as an Isaiahan chosen one of God. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus's acts and words belong together, each reflecting the promises of God. The passage does not simply describe the content of the good news—God's justice—but also describes the gentleness with which the good news will be proclaimed. The medium really is the message.

When a preacher gets to her most uncertain point, according to the old joke, she ought pound the pulpit loudly to distract the audience from what is being said. Since Jesus's message is perfectly congruent with his person, he doesn't have to resort to any theatrics, but instead has gentleness at his disposal.

Indeed, gentleness suffuses the passage. As a pastoral caregiver, I find words of verse twenty, "He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick," very comforting. Quite mysteriously, this will be an almost silent proclamation. In verse fifteen, Jesus has just ordered the people who he healed to be silent about who did it—the so-called messianic secret. In verse nineteen, the passage states that "no one will hear his voice in the streets." It seems that, contrary to loudly vying for your attention, the good news appears in secrecy and near silence.

Yet, the message manages to be radical even as it is proclaimed in gentle secrecy. First, the message that Jesus proclaims, according to verse eighteen, is "justice to the Gentiles," even as it is rooted in God's promises to Israel. This new message expands the horizon of what seems possible. God's justice is not just for the group that we're comfortable with, who we are used to interacting with from day to day. It's for neighbors we never imagined and even the whole world. Within the gentle imagination of the gospel God intends for justice to be victorious for both Israel and the Gentiles.

Jesus, a gentle messenger who invites rather than compels, offers a fresh vision of God's justice which brings hope to insiders and outsiders alike.

– Rev. Dr. Philip Browning Helsel
*Associate Professor in the Nancy Taylor
Williamson Distinguished Chair of Pastoral Care*



Thursday, December 8

Romans 5:12-18

The Gift that Makes the Difference

Paul discusses the impact of God's gift to humanity as a means of resolving the internal and external effects of original sin. The prognosis was considered dire, but Paul's excursus offers an immediate remedy that is deemed a "gift" (δωρεά) from God. God's gift (Jesus) is timely and efficacious. In one sense, it is the perfect gift; one that is given at no cost and is precisely what is needed, even if it is not expected. God's gift, in Paul's view, is also a form of grace (χάρις) extended to humanity. The word play between the meaning of grace (something freely given) and gift (also freely given), signals the benevolent character of the giver (God) and the free nature of what was given. Jesus's sacrifice and its effects of imputing justification to sinners is a one-sided transaction meant to benefit humanity. The giver and the one who makes the sacrifice are motivated by love and receive nothing tangible in return.

The gift of Christ is additionally a reminder of other gifts that God graciously bestows, whether material or spiritual. These gifts have the potential to benefit others just as the gift of Christ improves one's spiritual and eternal condition. Recipients of God's grace and gifts are also afforded the opportunity to implement Jesus's teaching concerning giving, "You received freely (δωρεάν), give freely (δωρεάν)." In other words, the way one receives free gifts from God should be emulated in how they give to others.

His teaching is likewise a reminder to be cognizant of the privilege and responsibility to share one's gifts in an edifying manner with others. This entails intentionally reflecting on one's gifts and how to practically enhance the physical, mental, or spiritual well-being of someone at just the right moment. Perhaps then, one can further confirm Jesus's words that truly "it is more blessed to give than to receive."



– Dr. Rodney A. Caruthers II
Assistant Professor of New Testament

Friday, December 9

Isaiah 11:1-6

From the very start Isaiah launches an all-out arraignment against Israel. He declares that the people do not know God. Many readers will recall the words of John 1.10, 11: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." In a similar vein, poet Alan of Lille wrote of human alienation from Nature: "Why do you force the knowledge of me to leave your memory and go abroad, you in whom my gifts proclaim me who have blessed you with the right bounteous gifts of so many favours; who, acting by an established covenant as the deputy of God, the creator, have from your earliest years established the appointed course of your life?"

Emphasizing the ignorance and rebellion of the people, the prophet notes that dumb animals know who is their master, but this people have no such knowledge. This comparison reminds me of a line from Erasmus's treatise on preaching, published late in his life: "If elephants can be trained to dance, lions to play, and leopards to hunt, surely priests can be taught to preach."

The thoroughness of Isaiah's indictment is troubling: the lack of knowledge, the corruption, and the punishment extend from the sole of the foot to the head. In the 1960s I was a pastor in the inner city of Philadelphia. The church's neighborhood was one third Black, one third Puerto Rican, and one third German. Today that neighborhood is all crack houses and is uninhabitable. For me this image symbolizes our deepening cultural and spiritual decline and alienation. Perhaps this exaggerates, but if so it is an exaggeration in the direction of the truth. How fitting Austin Seminary's President Ted Wardlaw's last charge to graduates implored them to just "tell the truth."

Given human abandonment of the divine, just how is it that the LORD continues to speak? The Holy does not cease to communicate with what is unholy! Can this mean that God has not given up on us? Our alienation does not change the caring nature of God. Can we hear both the prophetic indictment and the good news of the gospel? The Holy Word has become flesh and dwells among us, and has made God known again (John 1.18). In the midst of all of today's woes and wrongs, by God's grace and truth, may all of us envision, know, and live into the reality of this "good news of great joy."

– Rev. Dr. Ralph L. Underwood
Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Care



Saturday, December 10

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

“On my honor I will try to do my duty to God and country, to help other people at all times and to obey the Girl Scout Laws.” I learned this Girl Scout Promise more than fifty years ago and I recalled it from memory to write this. The Girl Scout Laws I can’t recite, but I remember a Girl Scout is thrifty, cheerful, courteous, friendly, loyal, and I know the last one, Number Ten, “clean in thought, word, and deed.”

The moral code I learned in Girl Scouts seemed to go right along with the morality I learned at church when I was a child. I aged out of Girl Scouts, and some people seem to age out of church. If they stayed to hear what Paul says in this letter to the Thessalonians, they might be surprised because it is no moral code.

This passage could read like Girl Scout Laws: A Christian rejoices. A Christian prays. A Christian give thanks. But here is where the plot twists ... thanks in all circumstances? Then I hear words that take me out of the moral quotidian: do not quench the Spirit, despise prophecies, test everything, hold fast, abstain from evil, be sanctified entirely, kept sound and blameless. These words smack of mystery and adventure and abundant life. More than that, though, and here’s the Christian part: We don’t achieve this way of life by our own sheer will and dedication. The very God of peace moves in us to make us whole and holy.

I couldn’t always live out the three prongs of the Girls Scout promise or all of the ten Girl Scout Laws as much as I tried, and try I did as a very committed young girl. Neither can I now always rejoice, give thanks in all circumstances, abstain from evil. But hear the good news: I am not left only to my own devices to hold fast to goodness and keep my soul sound. God became flesh and dwells within me and among us all and pulls us toward freedom from sin. Joy to the world.



– Melissa Wiginton
*Vice President for Education Beyond the Walls
and Research Professor in Methodist Studies*

Sunday, December 11

Galatians 4:1-5

“No!” shouted my brother.

I was crouched down collecting water in my cupped hands from an Alpine Lake somewhere on the border between Wyoming and Montana. Miles and miles of wilderness surrounded us. In two hours of hiking, I could get to four Alpine lakes, dozens of feeder streams connecting them, and a thing one would be very generous to call a road.

“We have poisoned everything, don’t drink it.” The “we” he was mentioning was not he and I, or his biology department at University of Montana, or even the state agencies he works for. It was the collective-humanity “we” he was referencing. Pollution laden rains, illegal dumpsites, and other horrible practices of our collective humanity have made this remote, seemingly perfectly untouched environment, dangerous to consume. Waters many degrees above normal now had bugs you did not want in your digestive track and especially not your brain.

I tossed aside what appeared to be crystal clear and untouched water with a frown, asking my brother “Who is the conservator here?” looking for the name or entity who had fallen short on taking responsibility for this land. Imagine me, miles from humanity, looking for an “adopt a highway” sign naming a Girl Scout troop who pays to clean the lake annually.

The question of responsibility is something we in the church struggle with as well. Paul is addressing a church that is concerned about who is adopted properly. Admittedly, if we had the choice, we would adopt easy problems, not the complexities of humans. The church of Galilee is suspicious of drinking freely of unchecked water. Paul is coarse in his language in chapter 4, calling everyone a minor needing adoption, reminding all who hear that our slavery to human selfishness is equal in its lacking. So in this advent season we await the Fullness of Time, that we all—that all creation—will be made whole and well.

– Rev. J.D. Herrera

Vice President for Enrollment Management



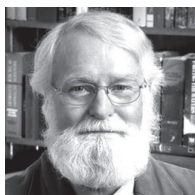
Monday, December 12

Romans 1:1-6

My granddad began his day with a cup of coffee in one hand, the morning newspaper in the other, yours truly by his side, and what must have seemed to him to be a never-ending flow of “what was it like when ...?” He never seemed to tire of my curiosity questions; rather, he seemed to take pleasure in those memory-lane journeys with his namesake grandson. Thanks be to God.

Happiness evoked is so special that the only appropriate response would be to praise God with a prayerful “thank you” and a heartfelt song of joyful gratitude for the gift of transforming grace. Amen!

Hard to fathom, is it not, that prayerful expression of gratitude to God such as these still resonate? Rarely is news in our day-to-day lives to be considered “of great joy.” And yet, on occasion, there await us surprises that can, indeed, be understood as welcomed surprises of great joy! For some, great joy surprises are packaged in messages of new-birth arrivals, others as delightful occurrences of relief from financial long-suffering or physical stress, or perhaps from the unfulfilled dreams of hoped-for “new days” of promise at the end of a life of dedicated, loyal service. The focal point of disappointment would seem to be the pain of heart when gratitude is hard to find in our daily walk of faith. It’s a puzzlement to grasp why, to accept that this is a part of life. The lesson learned is most often the (re-)discovery of God’s faithfulness that never fails! What wonderful news to learn that someone like the heavenly host brings to us good news of great joy! Thanks be to God for such wonderful surprises!



– Rev. Dr. John Alsup
*The First Presbyterian Church, Shreveport,
D. Thomason Professor Emeritus of
New Testament Studies*

Tuesday, December 13

Philippians 2:5-11

Pixar/Disney's 2015 animation *Inside Out* reminds us of the importance of embracing the entirety of our emotions. The film portrays interactions among main characters, namely, personifications of the basic emotions (Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust) in the mind of an adolescent girl, Riley. At the end of the story, Joy and Sadness, two seemingly opposite emotions, embrace each other. From their mutual acceptance, a new “core memory” with a blend of their colors emerges.

Throughout his letter to the Philippians, Paul continuously tells his audience, “Rejoice in the Lord!” (Phil. 3:1, 4:4). This joy is not monochrome. Paul was writing this letter under the circumstance where he might have every reason not to rejoice. He was in prison, uncertain about his future (perhaps, the possibility of his execution, 1:19-21, 2:17-18). Paul's call for joy is blended with, not ignorant of, sorrow and pain inherent in his apostolic life and in the human condition. That's why Paul's exhortation in Philippians is so powerful and enduring.

At the heart of Paul's epistle of this deep joy lies the Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:5-11) that presents Christ as the *exemplum* of humility for the Philippian community. In this encomium, Paul alludes to the joyous news for all: the eternal Son of God has come to the human world. Rather than a birth story featuring angels' praises, admiring visitors' gifts, or wondrous miracles, Paul paradoxically uses the language of slavery (2:7), resonating with many early Christians' day-to-day experience. Our singer quickly moves on to sing the most painful moment of the Son as a human—“death on a cross” (2:8). The hymn reaches its climax: God raised and highly exalted this crucified Jesus, resulting that his Lordship is universally acknowledged to the glory of God (2:9-11).

To be sure, Paul does not glorify suffering; rather, he knows that God embraces our suffering. God has a “core memory” of this bittersweet human life in Christ. The incarnate Son is the reason for our great joy and gratitude at the Advent season and beyond. Christ has come, is reigning, and is coming again. Maranatha!

– Dr. Donghyun Jeong
Assistant Professor of New Testament



Wednesday, December 14

Psalm 146:5-10

Christopher Smart's "The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1765) ends this way:

God, all-bounteous, all-creative ... is incarnate, and a native
Of the very world He made.

Today's reading recalls God's making of heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them. The psalmist also writes that God keeps faith forever, freeing prisoners, restoring health, lifting up the fallen, upholding the lonely. In a season of good news and great joy, are we faithless to ask whether this is true for everyone?

In a recent meeting to begin assembling worship elements for a conference next summer, a team on which I am serving had conversation about an old hymn which might resonate with this psalm excerpt, with Advent expectation and arrival, and with Christmas incarnation:

"There shall be showers of blessing"—this is the promise of love;
There shall be seasons refreshing, sent from the Savior above.

Our conversation included also the question: Is this true for everyone? Too many people wait for those showers and for refreshing seasons, not because God doesn't make the "promise of love" but because too many of us wall off others from the promise. We use our own incarnation to thwart others' incarnation. At this very moment, my phone buzzed with a child abduction alert—will there be good news there? If God is incarnate in order to reclaim incarnation itself, then perhaps the question is not so much, Are these promises true? as it is, How are we—ourselves already incarnate—involved in these promises becoming true? In a world spiraling with enmity and apathy, can the angels' song of good news be true without us?



– Eric Wall

*The Gene Alice Sherman Associate Professor
of Sacred Music & Dean of the Chapel*

In the wondrous repertory of Advent hymns, perhaps we should add another: 747 in The Presbyterian Hymnal *Glory to God*—"The Lord Now Sends Us Forth/Enviado soy de Dios," by José Aguiar and Pedro Infante, in English translation by Gerhard Cartford:

Enviado soy de Dios,
mi mano lista está
para construir con él
un mundo fraternal.

The Lord now sends us forth
with hands to serve and give,
to make of all the earth
a better place to live.

Los ángeles no son
enviados a cambiar
un mundo de dolor
por un mundo mayor.

The angels are sent
into our world of pain
to do what we were meant
to do in Jesus's name.

If God becomes a native of the world God made, bringing good news, what part are we—natives ourselves—in that good news?

Thursday, December 15

Luke 2:1-7

Thus begins one of the most lyrical stories of Christian lore, celebrated in poem, paint, and pageant, lifting up the most essential of human experiences—taxes. Luke reminds us that the pageantry we love is always situated in political reality, the necessary presence of governors, a state, a census, and an address. Note that there is no hint of hostility or claim of injustice here. Taxes are the necessary dues of civil society. We must beware of seeing all politics as dark and vile. Like all relationships, it has its deformities, but it is the way we contrive to live together and provide for each other.

As of this writing, the midterm elections are yet to come, but as you read, they are fulfilled. Lauded or loathed, a moment of social import has passed. Normally we might think that politics and joy do not mix. There may be shouts of triumph for electoral victory, but that is only joy for some, requiring the grief of others. That is not the joy that Christ bears. It is glee, not gladness.

I work the polls, confirming voters in the register of the eligible, handing them their ballot with instructions. Some have voted for years. For others, this is their first. There are those who count it an honor to cast their vote at 7:01 a.m. on the first day of early voting. Some stand in long lines. A handful I will know. They all count, and want to be counted. They cast aside the cynicism of what-for and who-cares.

We live in a world of emperors, governors, states, and municipalities. To this we bring the good news as people who count. This is our accountability, not only on those few days when we cast ballots, but every day. To this we must always bring joy. There is plenty enough of cynicism, anger, falsehood, bitterness, and malice. All that is bad news. To this we bring good news, couched in the language of joy. Because it counts. We count. They count.



—Rev. Dr. Whit Bodman
*Associate Professor Emeritus
of Comparative Religion*

Friday, December 16

Isaiah 40:1-11

The proclamation “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy” echoes an ancient lesson. It reminds me of a powerful lesson that is deeply woven into the fabric of Israel’s story with Yahweh. In Luke’s gospel, we read how the angel announces the birth of Israel’s messiah to a group of shepherds. What a peculiar audience. In the first-century Palestinian context, shepherds were likely uneducated, manual laborers who were responsible for tending to someone else’s property. You might be wondering, why does this matter?

Rather than sending the angel to the center of power or privilege to announce the “good news,” God reveals the miracle of the incarnation to marginalized people living under imperial occupation. This scene is yet another example of God’s relentless preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. It leads me to look for God in the most unexpected places.

The arrival of such a savior is cause for joy. In Christ, the God who led the Hebrews out of slavery has come to liberate us all. It is good news indeed.

– Dr. Ángel J. Gallardo
Assistant Professor of Church History



Saturday, December 17

Acts 10:34-43

“Behold, I bring you good news of great joy.” The angels speak to “the least of these,” to folks struggling to get by, to pregnant girls giving birth in stables, to shepherds laboring on starvation wages, no benefits, no security. Luke writes at the height of the Roman Empire, with its colonized peoples and radical inequities, its tiny elite and struggling masses. Understandably, the multitudes on that first Palm Sunday hope this is good news of a political revolution. Good Friday kills that hope. But more profound hope is born—there is victory on the cross. In our mental calendars, Christmas precedes Good Friday, and Good Friday is a stepping stone to Easter. In reality, the triumph on the cross is decisive, inspiring conviction about manger and resurrection. What is the passion of Passion Week? It is the passion of Jesus, a passionate concern for all the Faces to whom he ministered, the passion named “agape.” This is the passion of the Good Samaritan, the passion of the prodigal’s father. It is the passion of Lent—not giving for the sake of self-deprivation, but giving to others in surrender to agape. It is the passion of Advent and of Christmas—not giving to impress, cajole, or out of obligation, but giving to friends, family, and strangers in surrender to having been seized by agape for their Faces (giving gifts: perfect Christmas liturgy). Agape fires Jesus’s ministry, leading him to speak love (*agapeic*, “love your enemies,” gracious) to power. This witness leads to the cross. In Jesus, agape triumphs over threat of crosses, over violence securing the pseudo-pax of the Pax Romana. It triumphs at Gethsemane, triumphs at Golgotha. Behold the passion that secures true peace, the “Peace of Christ,” the “where two or three are gathered” peace of *koinonia*, the glorious peace of *iustia* (justification/forgiveness). This passion is so perfectly and powerfully manifest in the ministry and life of Jesus, “even unto death on a cross,” that it originates the conviction that Jesus is Emmanuel, agape incarnate. It originates sure hope that agape is not only alpha but omega, that an unending war of all against all is not ultimate, that agape will be the final word for every creature. Behold, good news of great joy.



– Dr. William Greenway
Professor of Philosophical Theology

Sunday, December 18

Romans 5:1-5

Esperança, not Confusion

The Bible I read, the one in my heart's language, translates Romans 5:5 as saying that “*esperança* (hope) does not bring confusion.” The Portuguese word for hope, *esperança*, is rooted in the word for waiting, *esperar*. I appreciate that particular choice of words because of how it highlights, in the vernacular, that waiting in God is not puzzling or drowned in uncertainty. Of course, life is indeed full of surprises, twists, and turns. Uncertainty, in that sense, is all around us, as the COVID-19 pandemic is here to remind those who need reminding. Uncertainties about the particularities of our faith commitments are also far from uncommon. Often doubts, to quote Frederick Buechner, “are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” But the waiting in God, the waiting itself, the hope that focuses not on a predictable outcome but on the expectation that God works things for good, has an aura of clarity. Our hope does not, in itself, confound!

The source of this hope, this waiting expectation, this *esperança*, is Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus that God's grace is accessible to all humankind. Jesus's birth brings the hope that another world is possible, the expectation that a world in which love, justice, and peace will prevail. Through Jesus, Christians are called to help implement aspects of this new possible world of justice, love, and peace. Our commitment to the Gospel and one another compels us to work for God's reign here and now. However, the new possible world that Jesus's birth represents is also radically ahead of us. As we work and live surrounded by extreme suffering at home and abroad, Jesus's birth reminds us that we are called to work for a better world and also to *esperança*: to work for the love, justice, and peace that Jesus's birth represents and also to wait expectantly for the day when, because of Jesus, all things will be new.

– Dr. João Chaves
Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Mission



Monday, December 19

Matthew 2:1-6

The Magi are some of the most enigmatic characters in all of scripture. They only appear in Matthew's gospel: unnamed, coming from somewhere in the East, only to disappear from the story and never be heard from again. Stargazers who ask about a child born to be king and where they might find him to pay him honor, they probably struck the residents of Jerusalem as rather bizarre.

They certainly attract Herod's attention. When he hears this news of a birth, his reaction is the opposite of the wise men: fear. Alarmed by a potential threat to his own power, Herod orchestrates one of the most horrific crimes recorded in all scripture: a mass slaughter of babies.

Strangers from the East pay homage to a newborn; a king who is close to the event resorts to murder. Scripture is full of stories that narrate opposing reactions between "insiders" and "outsiders." Herod, perhaps the consummate insider (as ruler of the people), cannot comprehend the significance of Jesus's birth. The Magi, outsiders who have no kinship or cultural connection to the events in this story, recognize the magnitude of the event.

We often think that the Jesus story is meant for insiders: a story for the church, a story that belongs to us. But the story of the Magi suggests it is something more: a story for the world that invites countless responses. We don't know anything else about the Magi. We don't know if they eventually became followers of Jesus after they returned home. But it seems reasonable to assume they did not. They are, however, changed: changed enough to make a long journey from the East; changed enough to seek a newborn king even when the established king becomes consumed by fear; changed enough to return home by another road. I think they're the ones who really get the story—a story that belongs to the world in all its splendor.



– Dr. David H. Jensen
*Professor in the Clarence N. and
Betty B. Frierson Distinguished Chair of
Reformed Theology*

Tuesday, December 20

Matthew 2:7-12

“... they left for their own country by another way.”

So says Matthew of the Magi who, having seen Jesus, depart for their homes in the Persian highlands. They vary their route, says the text, after being warned not to reveal to Herod the child's location.

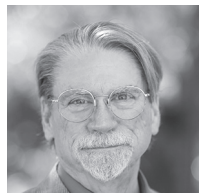
But I say there's another reason for the change in itinerary. Having made their way to the manger and laid out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, I think they look for the first and only time into the dark eyes of the child. And in that moment, I think, everything changes.

What happens when you come face to face with the Holy? When you stare over the edge of your comfortable reality into the abyss of the Infinite? Do you see your hopes and dreams absorbed, deconstructed, rearranged, and handed back to you? Do the antipodes of your existence reverse; do the poles exchange places? Does light become darkness, in become out? Do the poor become rich, the last become first? Do life and death cease to be ultimate concerns? Are you still you, if you are filled with a Not-You from far beyond you?

In his poem, “The Journey of the Magi,” T.S. Eliot speaks as a magus now returned home from seeing the Christ child. Home, that is, that isn't “home” anymore. He is “no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation ...” He concludes, “I should be glad of another death.”

I find myself wondering if that's the real reason why the Magi follow another route from the manger to the rest of their lives. Not because of politics, but because the dark eyes of the child have redrawn the road maps of their lives, and the old dispensations no longer hold any comfort. When “home” is just another word for the far country, every road takes you where you least expect to go.

– Rev. Dr. Paul Hooker
Adjunct Professor



Wednesday, December 21

I Corinthians 13:1-12

Hope for Beloved Community

This passage reminds us of the centrality of love to Christian faith, Christian hope, and the life of the church. We hear of love in the first of the ten commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures, and of love as the common link between the two greatest commandments spoken by Jesus in the New Testament—to love God and to love neighbor. Here in 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds us again of the centrality of love. Love is a framework for interpreting the world and a key part of the goal of the church. Perhaps the most glaring paradox in the text is that the Apostle Paul felt the need to describe and define love to the church, the body of Christ commissioned to carry the story of love. The church at Corinth met consistently, performed its requisite practices, produced the most eloquent sermons and the most accurate prophecies. Yet there was still a lacuna in the spiritual belly of the church. It fell out of touch with its central message of love, proclaimed by both Jesus and the Torah. How could this be?

The story of the birth and life of Jesus is the story of the incarnation of divine love for the world, a love reflected in Jesus's lifelong ministry of healing and justice. This divine love dwelt among the disinherited, called out to tax collectors, healed the sick, and cried out for freedom and justice for the poor. This story, and Paul's description in 1 Corinthians, is the driving force behind the vision for beloved community, which comes into being wherever we recognize the inherent worth and dignity of one another and live into the spirit of accompaniment modeled by Jesus. The story of Jesus gives us hope for lives not completely determined by the laws of supply and demand, national identity, or racial bloodlines, as it presses to love a God who embraces the whole family of creation and commends us to love our neighbors as ourselves. It gives us hope for living together rooted in love, guided by justice, and made whole through reconciliation.



– Dr. Asante Todd (MDiv'06)
Associate Professor of Christian Ethics

Thursday, December 22

Luke 2:8-14

These words of scripture always unroll as music in my head. The fall of familiar syllables matching the tempo of Gerald Finzi's "In Terra Pax," a choral setting of two verses from Robert Bridges's poem "Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913." I sang this magnificent piece under the equally magnificent conducting of our church's music director, Mark Ball (may his memory be a blessing). Singing with chamber orchestra and 90, yes 90, voices, as more than 1000 members and visitors filled our sanctuary one Christmas Eve, it was an experience I'll never forget. One which both heals and haunts me to this day.

Born in 1904 London into a German-Italian Jewish home, Finzi's early life was marked by loss. His father died young. By the age of eighteen, his three older brothers had perished in the war, as had his formative music teacher. Nevertheless he persisted, and it was said of him, "There could hardly be a more determinedly English musician in his work, musical outlook, tastes and recreations, way of life, than Finzi."

"In Terra Pax" was composed in 1954 and was among the last pieces Finzi wrote. Its origin, however, is linked to an event years before. Climbing up to church on a frosty Christmas Eve, the ringing of the midnight bells across the English valley imprinted upon him and emerged as the framing for this gospel account of the angels' appearance to the shepherds. "Fear not, fear not, fear not," the solo angel sings. The hours of rehearsal and eventual performance imprinted on me as well, and it has never been Christmas Eve again without multiple listenings to a recording of the piece.

What do you need to hear to believe the angel song? What life and loss seeks healing in your life, in these particular challenging times? By placing a biblical story into an English pastoral context, Finzi models for all of us the merging of Christ's story and our own, "at once personal yet universal." He once explained that "the Nativity becomes a vision seen by a wanderer on a dark and frosty Christmas Eve in our own familiar landscape." Wherever you wander this season, may you be imprinted by the healing, haunting message "fear not." And, dear and gracious God, may all of us know and share "on earth peace, good will toward all."

— Rev. Bobbi Kaye Jones (MDiv'80)
*Professor in the Louis H. and Katherine S.
Zbinden Distinguished Chair of Pastoral
Ministry and Leadership*



Friday, December 23

Matthew 1:18-25

In Joseph's mind, the news that his betrothed was pregnant certainly wasn't good news or cause for great joy. Not only was Mary's pre-wedding pregnancy scandalous, but Joseph also knew that the child wasn't his. Joseph's world feels turned upside down and joyless as he quietly decides to break up. An angel then appears with news that will turn his world upside down yet again: the child is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel says that Joseph wasted no time upon waking up; he did as the angel said without any hesitation. I haven't seen an angel recently (or ever), but if I were in Joseph's position, I'm sure I would have thoroughly considered my next steps and the personal ramifications of following the angel's advice.

Certainly, small town gossip mills aren't kind to tales like Joseph's. Was he painted as the patsy for believing Mary, or a dolt for relating the tale of an angel bringing news that God had impregnated his fiancée? One must question whether the flight to Egypt to escape Herod was also a flight from rumors and slander in their tiny hamlet.

Furthermore, the passage is silent on whether Joseph was prepared to raise a child who wasn't his biologically. How did Joseph react when he saw Jesus but didn't see his own reflection in the boy's gaze? As a father of a young infant, I am pained by twinges of jealousy when friends and family remark on the fact that Oliver (thankfully) has his mother's features but few, if any, of mine. Did Joseph not experience similar moments of jealousy? Would these moments not be accompanied by the remembrance that the boy wasn't his own, leading to renewed suspicion and disbelief? Was he tempted to doubt his own experience with the angel throughout the years? Did he ever wonder if the angel had appeared in his mind, a helpful psychological strategy to overcome a most horrible problem?



—Dr. Andrew Zirschky
Research Professor in Youth Ministry

When we consider the particularity of the human actors involved, we realize that “Good news of great joy” seldom arrives without personal complications, difficulties, and struggle. What is of God doesn’t always enter the world in ways that are convenient, smooth, or personally easy. I often hear students talk about seeking God’s calling by looking for “open doors” or easy pathways. But I’m reminded by Joseph’s story that when we commit to being agents of God’s Kingdom breaking into the world, our lives may be disrupted and disturbed as a result.

The coming of God’s Great Joy into the world is good news, but rarely is it easy.

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:15-20

Shepherds were nobody's wimps. Nothing scared them easily, these hardened men who spent their days and nights fighting off bears and lions from their wandering flocks. No one would call shepherds gullible, these no-nonsense men armed with slings and spears like David of yore.

So why did they just abandon their vulnerable flocks to the nocturnal predators to go in search of a baby in a feeding trough? What made them leave? Was it their common experience of terror and wonder at the amassing and proclamation by heaven's army? Or were they looking for a miracle, a reason to hope, the possibility that, in the midst of a difficult and dangerous world, there might be room for joy?

Joy! Joy in the person of a baby, born, delivered, swaddled, and cradled: yes, that surely brings joy to our worlds. Joy, in that this baby is known, named, loved by God! We know that joy, reclaiming it at every baptism, for every child of God, even for us.

Yes, these joys arrive with the shepherds.

Good news arrives also, good news not simply of the birth of a healthy baby, but greater joy even than that. Greater joy that God does not abandon God's people. Greater joy that that God who heard the laments of the Hebrew people in Egypt and the exiles in Ethiopia and Babylon, hears also our cries. And God provides, provides not only joy—a baby is born—but great joy: rescue, salvation, the inbreaking of God's kin-dom into this God-beloved world.

Mary holds on to that joy. Herself barely over the pain and labor of childbirth, she becomes a repository for the joy of a new baby, a new family, the joy of surviving childbirth at a time when such survival was never guaranteed. Mary holds on also to greater joy, the proclamation, the affirmation



– Rev. Dr. Margaret Aymer
*Academic Dean and The First Presbyterian
Church, Shreveport, D. Thomason Professor
of New Testament Studies*

that the last nine months of her life have not been a lie, a deception, a fantastic story she made up to hide her own shame. For Mary, she holds on to the greater joy that God really did choose her, call her, fill her. She is forever the God-bearer, the *Theotokos*. She who was pregnant with the Christ now is become a bearer of this good news of great joy, pondering it in her heart. God has done it. She has been faithful. Heaven has proclaimed it. Christ is born.

To us also, the shepherds bring this good news of great joy. To us they bear witness of the proclamation, witness of the inbreaking of God's reign. And we, like Mary, may hold this treasure, this great good news in our hearts. God has done it. Mary has been faithful. Heaven has proclaimed it. Christ is born. Behold! Good news of great joy!

Christmas Day

John 1:1-5

As Christians, our familiarity with the opening verse of John's gospel invests its words with sheer simplicity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As a philosophy major during my college years, I was intrigued with the many ways the Greek word "logos" in this text—the concept we read in English as "Word"—is translated into different languages. In Chinese language, God incarnate is the "Tao" (Way) that was since the beginning. In Spanish-speaking churches we recite solemnly, "*En el principio era el verbo*," literally "in the beginning was the *verb*." I personally like to read this verse assuming God became flesh in Christ, not as any type of "word"—an abstract and decisive message—but as a verb—the active speech of God communicating anew in every action of the faithful.

When I see the "logos" through the lenses of faithful action, I can imagine the traditional scenes of Christmas as less a remarkable story retold each year but rather a series of meaningful motions as God interacts with the world. Christmas is a choir of angels *flapping* wings to remain suspended midair as they sing "Glory to God in the Highest." (Can you imagine the stamina required to sing a high C note while strenuously moving body parts? But, as we know, joy brings out levels of energy we unsuspectingly carry within us.) Christmas is Mary and Joseph *rocking* a wobbly crib to soothe the newborn baby, forcing weary smiles after hours of travel and birthing. Christmas is wondering infant eyes *looking*, attracted by the rays of light slipping through the rooftop straw. It is little arms *reaching* out to grasp the untouchable.

In many ways, the birth of Jesus is as mundane as our use of words. It is unpredictable movement and action, and that is perhaps what makes it such a holy moment: God becomes so alive outside the contours of our spoken beliefs and scripted expectations. Christmas is the celebration of the Verb. God *reached* out us. God *took* flesh. The unmovable God *became* motion. He was fully human, and so are we.

Let us pray that our Christmas celebration becomes a time to experience God beyond our conventional words, in the ordinary simplicity of our everyday actions.



– Rev. Dr. José R. Irizarry
President and Professor of Practical Theology



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Thank you for accompanying the Austin Seminary faculty as they reflected upon the biblical texts of the Christmas story this year. We hope these thoughts contributed to your Advent journey in a meaningful way. Please know that Austin Seminary's dedicated and loving community of faith is not complete without you.

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