



THE 2025 ANGLICAN

# Advent Devotional

Presented by

The Anglican Province of America's  
Deanery of Appalachia

# **2025 Advent Devotional**

Presented by the APA Deanery of Appalachia

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

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Cover Art - *The Evening Birth of Christ* (1869)  
by Michael Rieser (1828-1905)

In memory of  
The Reverend Stokes Smith  
(1952-2024)

*O Come, Desire of nations bind,  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,  
And be thyself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!*

Latin, 9th Century  
(1940 Episcopal Church Hymnal, Number 2)

# Prologue

In the gospel narratives of the New Testament, there are described a variety of responses to the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ. The shepherds and the wise men have the appropriate response of awe and worship and reverence. The Pharisees and scribes respond with suspicion and resentment completely inappropriate for the glorious occasion. Children ran to him immediately as one who could be implicitly trusted. Demons squirmed to get away from him as one whose judgement was authoritative, just, and final. The proud tried to justify themselves, the humble wanted him to stay and to teach.

In the season of Advent, we are given the annual opportunity to liturgically and ascetically rehearse our response to the Lord's arrival. It is a time of repentance and remedy for whatever part of us has been more like a Pharisee than a wise man, more like a demon than a child.

Meditations in this devotional have been contributed by many who work diligently for the Kingdom of God in the Continuing Anglican Church. The meditations contained in this devotional are meant to aide readers in their preparation for the great Feast of the Incarnation, the feast of the arrival of the Messiah. Their works follow the passages appointed in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer lectionary (1945 edition) for Morning and Evening Offices and are meant to enhance your rule of life for the next weeks as you, along with the Church, rehearse your appropriate response to his advent. When we all finally sing together "the Lord is come," may our careful Advent fast turn to a carefree feast of "Joy to the world" indeed.

Father Paul Rivard  
Dean of Appalachia, Rector of Saint George the Martyr  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 1 - Sunday, November 30

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*“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”*

(Revelation 3:15,16)

**T**he Revelation of Saint John the Divine begins with seven letters to the seven Churches of Asia Minor. The last of these letters is a severe warning to the Church of Laodicea from ‘The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God’ - that is, from Jesus, the Word, ‘without [whom] was not anything made that was made’ (St. John 1:3). This warning is entirely apt for the first Evensong of Advent.

At the beginning of Advent, we make a fresh start. The Church year begins again with its ancient cycle of seasons, feasts, and sanctities. We quite literally flip back to the beginning of our Prayer Book lectionaries and to the first pages of our hymnals and missals. Less literally, Advent is a season for spiritual renewal, for casting ‘away the works of darkness’ and putting ‘upon us the armour light’ in preparation both for Christmas and also for ‘the last day’ and our Lord’s return then ‘in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead’ (Collect for Advent D). Throughout the season we find recurring themes of spiritual preparation and care: as when the collect just quoted is repeated at every Office and Mass and when lessons from Revelation are read at Evensong until Christmas. All this week, also, the beginning of Saint

Mark's gospel at Morning Prayer reminds us of the urgency of the gospel: 'immediately...immediately...straightway...forthwith...immediately.' The gospel train is rushing past, and we need to hop on board lest it pass us by.

Spiritual care, earnest preparation for the final judgement, and a sense of urgency are precisely what the Laodiceans lacked. The proverbially lukewarm church of Laodicea was utterly displeasing to her Lord: 'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' Our positive Advent duty should be accompanied by a profound desire to avoid that fate.

We should notice, finally, that the Laodicean church was prosperous and self-contented: 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' The danger of prosperous complacency is grave. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, the surest road to hell is the gently sloping downward path of middle age. The fervor of youth and first love past, lukewarm becomes an easy, and dangerous, tendency.

Our Advent task, then, is clear. Renewed devotion, greater diligence in prayer, regular Bible reading, and making a good confession before our Christmas communion: such endeavors, undertaken in a quiet and humble spirit, will, we pray, spare us the fate of the lukewarm and complacent Laodiceans.

Archbishop Mark D. Haverland  
Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Catholic Church  
Athens, GA

# Advent 1 - Monday, December 1

## St. Andrew's Day (transferred)

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Evening Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 49:1-6

*“The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”*

(Isaiah 49:1-3)

**S**t. Andrew is an “Apostle.” “Apostle” is from the Greek, *apostolos*, and means “messenger,” or in its verb form, “to send forth.” An Apostle is one that is sent forth and bears a message. The Twelve Disciples (and St. Paul) were called Apostles since they were sent out with a message. This message was the Gospel, or *evangelion* in Greek. Gospel means “good news.” That brings to mind the logical question, “What is the Good News?” Christians often understand Gospel to mean that we have redemption in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven, and we are made right with God. Too many Christians end the Gospel right there. Doing that often cuts off the responsibility that is placed on us.

All mankind is invited to join in this victory of Christ over sin, death, and the devil. The Good News is a declaration of an accomplished fact, and this declaration has an assumed question: “Whose side are you on?” Each person must choose whether to join the victorious side of Christ, or to

continue their lot with the losing side - death and the devil. However, not all mankind yet knows this story. That is why there must be apostles, ones sent to teach Humanity of the victory of Jesus Christ.

The Church assigns the title Apostle to a select group of men, yet all Christians are called to be messengers who announce the Good News of Christ's victory. Throughout history, the Church has assigned the title of Apostle in a lesser way to those men and women who have spread the Good News to lands where it was unknown. Thus, St. Patrick is the Apostle to the Irish, St. Boniface is the Apostle to the Germans, Ss. Cyril and Methodius are the Apostles to the Slavs. Indeed, St. Mary Magdelene is sometimes called the Apostle to the Apostles, since she was the first to bear witness of Christ's Resurrection to the disciples.

Each one of us is a Christian because someone was an Apostle to us. A parent, priest, or teacher taught us of Jesus Christ. Someone placed a Bible or a religious tract in our hands and told us "Read this." Our salvation is through Christ alone, but we couldn't know of that salvation unless God sent someone to us to tell us the Good News.

It's fitting that right before Advent begins, we celebrate the Feast of an Apostle. Advent is the season of remembering Christ's first coming and looking toward His Second Coming. The time is urgent to preach the Good News. Christ has come, and He will return. Each Christian has an imperative to inform the world of the Gospel and to turn Mankind's heart to Christ, who shall return in glory to judge both the quick and the dead.

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

# Advent 1 - Tuesday, December 2

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 4

*“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty...”*  
(Revelation 4.8)

**T**here are times that one hears the sentiment, “I wish I could die and go to heaven” or, so and so died, and now he or she is in heaven. Does one have to die to go to heaven? Strictly speaking, the answer would have to be, “YES, absolutely—but not necessarily physically.”

Think of your Baptism and Confirmation wherein you are united to Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes, in Romans 6:3ff, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life.” That we have already died with Christ applies to all who are Christians.

St. Paul and St. John are wonderful examples of this. Both of them had personal experiences of being in heaven. St. John heard a voice calling him and, “immediately” he says, “I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne...” He describes the One on the Throne, along with those around the throne--the elders, the seven spirits. Before the Throne were four beasts who “rest not day and night, saying Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty...”

In the Eucharistic Liturgy is something similar. We say (or sing),

Priest. Lift up your hearts.

Answer. We lift them up unto the Lord.

Priest. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

Answer. It is meet and right so to do.

Priest. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.

Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying,

All. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, Lord God of hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High. Amen.

If we lift our hearts unto the Lord, we are where He is and we are, in our worship, joining together with the Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven in praising Him. Our prayers are not merely ‘text messages’ to God begging for something, they are a participation in the new life that has been given to us wherein we praise and glorify God, remembering that the One on the Throne is in control, and we learn to contextualize our prayerful wants and desires.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. We thank you Lord!

Father Robert Mansfield, SSC

Vicar General Missionary District of Canada, ACC

Priest-in-Charge, St. John’s Parry Sound, ON

# Advent 1 - Wednesday, December 3

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 5

*“And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen’, and the elders  
fell down and worshipped him.”*

(Revelation 5:14)

**T**he story goes, a wise old bishop listened patiently as a teenager explained how much he disliked liturgy, hymnody, and all the trappings of religion such as priests, saints, fancy vestments and, especially, incense. After enduring the familiar spiel, the bishop said, very slowly and gravely, “Well, I pity you because you will not enjoy heaven.”

During Advent, it is customary to consider the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. To that end, each day of the first week in Advent we read two lessons from Isaiah (a prophet announcing judgment and death), St. Mark (with its stark warning of hell), and The Revelation (a glimpse into heaven). This week’s readings in Revelation are taken from what is often called “The Great Liturgy of Heaven,” conveying to us the worship that prevails in the heavenly realms and inviting us to contemplate Heaven itself.

It is good and right to notice that the worship of heaven is indeed liturgical - everyone has a part to play: all sing the eternal hymns, all bend the knee, and all repeat the never-ending refrains of adoration and thanksgiving. This is simply what heaven is really like, and our best Sunday morning liturgies are feeble yet fervent attempts to worship “on earth as it is in heaven.”

However, we ought to consider what it is that inspires this great heavenly liturgy. What would prompt unending adoration?

The answer to this is found in Revelation 5, where the Apostle says, “I wept much, for no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the Elders said to me, “Weep not; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has conquered, so that he can open the scroll...” (Could this be the real meaning of the promise that all tears will be wiped from our eyes?)

The Scroll of course contains the Gospel, not a written message but an unfolding salvation. In that unfolding scroll Heaven is revealed as the courtroom of the Conqueror who has won all right and might. From his heavenly throne he sends out his judgments and his rewards, condemnation for the wicked and balm for the wounded. Heaven is the epicenter of salvation because it is the dwelling place of the Savior, that “Lamb that was slain.”

Because of these unfolding mysteries of Salvation, rolling out as if from a scroll, Heaven is that place where the happy few fall down in ecstatic joy, sing in joyful praise, shout in startled wonder, faint in utter relief to be found in the presence of the One and only One who is worthy to open Salvation to all believers.

“And I heard around the throne myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb!’”

If you are heavenward bound, prepare to be amazed!

Father Brad Cunningham  
Rector of Holy Trinity Anglican Church  
Fernandina Beach, FL

# Advent 1 - Thursday, December 4

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 4

*“Why standest thou so far off, O LORD, \* and hidest thy face  
in the needful time of trouble?”*

(Psalm 10:1)

**H**ow many times have we cried unto the Lord from the depths of our souls in sorrow and frustration for the trials we and others endure? That mournful wail escapes us in our moments of desperation and loss. We beg for answers from the Ultimate Being who created all things and watches over His Creation. How could He be so blind to our plight? Why is He so slow in providing for our seemingly immediate needs?

In our pursuit of Christ, we struggle in this temporal “sphere” where our understanding is incomplete - unable to perceive the nature, purpose, and resolve of God’s solutions to our immediate concerns. He moves, but we cannot see it. He acts, and we don’t know it. We do not perceive it because we are bound to our linear timeline. Therefore, our only recourse is to trust Him who exists in eternity, who made all things and who has sent His Love into the world for our salvation. While we may not be able to visualize the ends God has purposed, we know He loves us beyond measure, has provided for us, and will bring us to eternal glory in Christ Jesus.

During Advent, we seek to align ourselves to the Will of God, waiting for Him to reveal Himself to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. We look back to the first Advent - that blessed Nativity where the Lord was made manifest in a

stable in Bethlehem - and we look forward to that Day of Judgment where He will come again to separate the sheep from the goats. Advent encourages us to believe He leads us to the best. We need not worry because He is active even when we cannot notice the tendrils of hope and scope of grace that surround us.

When we look at today's second lesson for morning prayer (Mark 1:40-45), we read of Christ's healing of the leper. The leper had spent untold days, hours, weeks, and maybe even years in his sickened state. He did not know if God would ever hear his plea for healing. Yet he makes his way to Jesus and beseeches Him to make him clean. Then "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, 'I will; be thou clean.'" And the man was healed at that moment. All his fears and sorrows for his terrible predicament were overcome by the instant touch of Christ.

We never know when the Lord is going to move in our lives, nor how, but we should never give up hope. He promises us His provision and love and will meet us when the time is right.

I pray your Advent journey deepens your faith in the God who watches and heals. The Lord who has compassion and understands our needs. Be patient. Be ready, and trust Him above all else.

Father Kenneth Bailey  
Rector of Saint Matthew's Anglican Church  
Riverview, FL

# Advent 1 - Friday, December 5

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Morning Prayer - Psalm 22

*“They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness!”*  
(Psalm 22:32)

**T**he scriptural passages from this morning’s readings—Isaiah, Psalm 22, and the Gospel of Mark—collectively evoke a profound sense of urgency. The prophet Isaiah issues grave admonitions to Israel, encapsulated in the recurring “Woe to those…” warnings. The well-known messianic Psalm 22 includes poignant appeals such as “Be not thou far from me, O Lord,” and “Deliver my soul from the sword.” The narrative in Mark’s Gospel further intensifies this theme, depicting Jesus in a crowded setting where the paralytic’s friends, unable to access the Lord directly, resort to lowering their companion through the roof. This sequence of readings is unified by an underlying imperative: in the dark hour, get to God. Do we urgently seek God? Certainly, in sickness, societal turmoil, or personal crisis, we seek God fervently and wholeheartedly. But are we as intense in times of tranquility? If you did not have a dreadfully sick friend in Capernaum that day, if all had been well in the world with you and yours, do you think you would have fought the crowded house to get to the Lord? Would your desire for the Lord have been urgent?

Modern conveniences have created a prevalence of procrastination. Procrastinating has become the normal way of things. Our grandparents or great-grandparents (depending on your age) did not have such luxury. In those

days, canning the garden's yield for the winter months required timely execution. To ensure there was bread for meals, baking was assigned to specific days during the week. Laundry could not be "tossed in" the machines at the last minute. There was a world of preparation, hard work, and oftentimes urgency. While technological advancements have afforded us the luxury of postponement, such attitudes must not extend to our spiritual preparation. For the sake of every soul we know and meet, we must recapture a sense of urgency...because Christ has come and Christ will return.

Are you ready for Jesus? In anticipation of Christ's return, the question of readiness becomes paramount. Are you preparing the way of the Lord with the same zeal and urgency exemplified by John the Baptist? The season of Advent offers a unique opportunity to recapture a sense of urgency by spreading the Gospel to all who will hear you. Celebrate not only the nativity of Christ but rejoice in His return. Be ever watchful for that great day—our Lord's eschatological promise that the Son of Man will come with power and glory, accompanied by the trumpet's blasting and the gathering of His elect. Brothers and sisters, our salvation demands vigilance and preparation, not only for ourselves but for all of mankind.

In St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." The Good News is not merely to be received but also to be shared. Who will you share Christ's message of salvation with today? Go and declare His righteousness!

Deaconess Cynthia Hensley  
All Saint's Anglican Church  
Mills River, NC

# Advent 1 - Saturday, December 6

## St. Nicholas Day

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Evening Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 7:10-20

*“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*

(Isaiah 7:14)

**T**oday the Church celebrates the feast of St. Nicholas, the bishop of Myra. A man known as the patron saint of sailors, merchants, and of course, toy makers. Much folklore surrounds Ol’ St. Nick, drawn from stories of secret nighttime gifts offering assistance with young girls’ dowries. While the original St. Nicholas wasn’t from the North Pole, he didn’t wear red all the time, nor did he ever meet any red-nosed reindeer; he did defend the divinity of our Lord at the Council of Nicaea, the very divinity about which Isaiah prophesied.

In the first reading of Evening Prayer, we are given one of the most well-known prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. So important is this prophecy that St. Matthew, in his Gospel, directly quotes this passage from Isaiah (Matt 1:23). With years of tradition recalling this quotation from Isaiah, we sometimes forget the context in which the prophecy was given.

Isaiah is speaking to King Ahaz, with the backdrop of the threat of invasion. We read that Ahaz’s “heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are

moved with wind.” To put it another way, they were shaking in their boots. Isaiah offered the king a sign to show that God is with them, even when it seemed like He wasn’t. Ahaz, with false piety, refused. He said, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.” He doesn’t want a sign because he has already made up his mind. He has already chosen not to trust in the Lord.

Isaiah is not fooled by this false humility and rebukes the King, saying, “Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?” Isaiah gives the sign anyway, not to comfort the King anymore, but to prove to him that God will still show up.

While this prophecy was fulfilled to an extent, in its own day, it was not meant just for the time of Isaiah and the fearful King. This prophecy also had a future meaning, proclaiming the coming of a King, who truly was what His name suggests: “God with us.” This foretold child is Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, both God and man, savior of the world. When our Lord promises to show up in our lives, how do we receive him? Are we like King Ahaz, shaking with fear, disregarding what God is trying to do, yet still following our own path, or are we like the Blessed Virgin Mary, receptive and willing to say, “Yes!”? May we happily receive “God with us,” and, like St. Nicholas, be willing to share and defend the glory of the God-Man.

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

## Advent 2 - Sunday, December 7

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 1:26-56

*“Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”*

(Luke 1:28)

**I**n Isaiah 51 and 52, God speaks to shamed Jerusalem. There she sits, a city made desolate by the nations. Whose people had been carried off and subjugated. Enslaved. The passage paints a picture of a shell-shocked woman sitting in complete disarray. A woman sitting in the dust of a war-torn city, ravaged by fear and drunk with sorrow. In His mercy, God approaches the woman to take the cup of wrath from her trembling hand. He places his hands upon her shoulders and looks in her eyes and says,

*“Wake up. Wake up. Clothe yourself with strength. Let’s go and dress you for a feast of renewal. Shake the dust off and let’s get these bonds off your neck. This is the last time you will be treated so shamefully. I promise.”*

Here the Lord himself comes to redeem his people, Israel. And not Israel only, but the gentiles. And then, not the gentiles only, but us in our time. The words of comfort and restoration are for each one of us. The promised Messiah shall come and deliver his people from the desolation of sin. All who have been sold into captivity for nothing will be redeemed, not with money, but with the blood of the Lamb.

Humanity itself, sitting in the ashes of desolation, is called to wake up and be renewed in the angelic greeting spoken to Mary, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you!” God himself rescues us in the child she will bear. The marriage of the Godhead with our humanity in the Son shall clothe us in wedding garments for eternal life. In Him our desolation shall be healed.

Women especially, bear a burden because of the desolations that have come upon us in these desperate days. Many are emotionally burned out and distraught, sitting in the dust of broken relationships, political disharmony, and overwhelmed by it all. Know that it is not your job to put the world back together. As God draws near to Israel in her desolation and Mary in her vulnerability, he draws near to you. He offers to take the cup of distress from your trembling hand. The Messiah has come and our hope is in Him. He comes to lift the poor from their ash heap. To give a garland of praise for a spirit of heaviness. He will restore relationships and bring peace when He returns. He will comfort His people and all the earth shall see the salvation of our God!

Father Matthew Mirabile  
Rector of Trinity Anglican Church  
Rochester, NH

## Advent 2 - Monday, December 8

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 11:15ff

*“...The kingdoms of this world are become [the kingdoms] of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever...”*

(Revelation 11:15)

**W**e mark the second week of Advent by lighting the second candle in our wreaths, the candle of Hope. Christian hope is not wishful thinking. Every year around Christmas time, I begin to wish for things I hope might be under our tree Christmas morning. When I was young, I wished for a new bicycle (well, I do every year actually!), and one year my old bicycle went missing a couple of weeks before Christmas. My brother told me that someone had probably stolen it from our yard; because I had not put it away in the garage, he said, I would have to buy a new one with my nonexistent money. I was devastated and my hope shattered. In truth, my parents had traded the bicycle in, and on Christmas morning, I received a beautiful new bicycle. My hopes were fulfilled! This type of hope, though, is very different from what our second candle represents.

The Collect for Advent II says that Christian hope is the blessed hope of everlasting life which was given to us in our Savior Jesus Christ. You see, this is not wishful thinking, because Jesus Christ, through his birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection, has already secured for us this most wonderful gift of everlasting life. Nothing can shatter that

hope--it is sure. We know that in the end, all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord, and Jesus Christ now sits on the throne of the universe, clothed in human flesh.

Unlike wishes, Christian hope is a virtue, or in other words, a strength or power through which we live and view the world. This is the hope given to us as a seed at our baptisms. We grow that gift of hope through prayer and deeds of charity, and it matures through our own trials and afflictions. Hope grounds us like an anchor even as we face our greatest trials of death and judgment, the other themes for the first two weeks of Advent.

The kingdom is not imposed upon history--God works within history and time. Today is also the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and this feast helps us see how God works with real people to accomplish his will. God worked within a long lineage of ancestors before the birth of Mary. Her parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, were pious and devoted parents who were also anchored by their hope in God's love for his people. They helped raise Mary and taught her how to love God, follow his Law, and hope in Him. And through Mary we receive the light of the world, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Mary had sure hope despite her sorrows. God did not just use Mary as an instrument but worked with her to bring about his purpose. And so God still works through us to accomplish his will. May we learn from Mary's example and respond in sure hope to God's call to us this Advent: "Be it unto me according to thy word."

Father Sean McDermott  
Rector of All Saints Anglican Church  
Charlottesville, VA

## Advent 2 - Tuesday, December 9

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 12:1-12

*“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars... And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”*

(Revelation 12:1,5)

Part of what makes biblical apocalyptic so compelling is how vividly it displays qualities present throughout Scripture. Its colorful, often cryptic imagery enchants the imagination. Its careful use of symbols drawn from earlier texts invites us to read Scripture with Scripture. Most importantly, apocalyptic writing reveals the Bible’s capacity for multiple senses and layers of meaning that reward a lifetime of contemplation. Our second lesson this evening demonstrates this especially well.

Revelation 12 introduces the striking image of “a woman clothed with the sun.” Questions about her identity remain alive to this day. Is this the blessed Virgin Mary depicted as Queen of Heaven? That reading fits the context, for she bears the child destined “to rule all nations” and to be enthroned with God (Rev. 12:5). Or is the woman a symbol of the Church, pursued by the great dragon yet preserved by God’s protection as she sojourns in the wilderness? Both interpretations can be found among the Fathers of the Church.

The most satisfactory answer is, simply, yes. She is Mary, and she is also the Church, an identification that is theologically fitting, since the Virgin functions as an icon of the Church. Like Mary, the Church is called to virginal purity: a spotless bride consecrated to God and adorned for her Bridegroom (Eph. 5:27). For this reason, after confessing the Church's unity in the Nicene Creed, we confess her holiness. Like Mary, the Church conceives and bears Christ for the life of the world by the power of the Holy Ghost: Christians ("little Christs") are not born of blood or the will of the flesh (John 1:13) but of water and the Spirit in holy baptism (John 3:5). Like Mary, the Church is meant to respond to God's call in faith, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). And like Mary, the Church is destined to share in the heavenly reign of God's Anointed King.

It is therefore fitting that, each evening, Mary's song becomes the Church's own. In the Daily Office, the Magnificat is our canticle of praise. If you followed Evening Prayer today, you will have prayed it just before hearing this lesson from Revelation 12. In repeating her words, our hearts are trained in her faith. Her vision becomes our vision, and, little by little, we learn to see the Lord our souls were made to magnify. May we all, like Mary, wait in hope for the Day of Christ's appearing when we will all get to behold the sweetness of His face.

Doctor Jesse Stone

Aspirant at Holy Cross Anglican Church

Farragut, TN

## Advent 2 - Wednesday, December 10

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 11:1-10

*“...and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”*

(Isaiah 11:4)

**T**his morning’s reading from Isaiah is an Advent classic. Its images and phrases can be found in countless hymns, poems, and songs – not to mention adorning many a home in cross-stitch or calligraphy. And with good reason. Few texts so powerfully capture the heart of this strange, bittersweet season of Advent.

During Advent, we remember Israel’s long-ago hope for redemption through “the rod out of the stem of Jesse.” We look towards our Christmas celebrations with sweet anticipation, knowing that in Jesus Israel’s hope became the hope of the nations: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” But in stark contrast with the pleasant-if-shallow secular celebrations that constantly bombard us – “Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and “Here Comes Santa Claus” and the like – our anticipation of Christmas is also shot through with our own longing for the fullness of redemption and restoration that is yet to come.

Christ has come. He is making all things new. And yet, in this present age, wolves still devour lambs. Asp and adder strike. Leopards eat kids. Lions hunt calves. We know that Jesus Christ was and is Israel’s hope and consolation, but still the martyrs cry out, “How long, O Lord?” (Rev. 6:10). To read today’s passage is to long for what we do not yet see: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the

earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Even all this – solemn remembrance, sweet anticipation, sorrowful longing – does not quite capture the rich complexity of this season. None of these threads includes the Advent theme that most struck me when I came to the Anglican tradition out of a Baptist upbringing: the fear of the Lord. The promise that the root of Jesse “shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” somehow never makes its way into “December to Remember” sales events, but it is an essential element of our hopeful and fearful expectation. When we yearn for restoration and redemption, we must also confront God’s justice and his impending judgment of sin. If we wish not to be slain by “the breath of his lips” nor smited with “the rod of his mouth,” then we must be about slaying wickedness in our own lives.

Although this does not make Advent indistinguishable from Lent, it does mean that Advent includes a penitential tint in its complex palette. The baby Jesus who will be laid in the empty manger of our nativity scenes – that baby would go on to be crucified for our sins, and, as we will hear in Evening Prayer next week, he will one day return on a white horse with a sharp sword coming out of his mouth to smite the nations (Rev. 19:11-16). Memory, anticipation, longing, and fear – each has its place in this, the preeminent season of Christian hope.

Father Mark Perkins  
Chaplain of Saint Dunstan’s Academy  
Roseland, VA

# Advent 2 - Thursday, December 11

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Revelation 14:1-13

*“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them...”*

(Revelation 14:13)

**A**dvent is a penitential season, marked by the liturgical color violet, where we especially focus on the creedal statements that Jesus Christ “shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.” And, “I look for the Resurrection of the dead: and the Life of the world to come.” It does take effort to remind ourselves of the four notes of Advent - the four last things, Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell - surrounded by a consumer culture that shamelessly commodifies the Christmas festal celebration, starts the silver bells ringing, and keeps them ding-a-linging all of December. The discipline of the Daily Office, with its structure of reading the Bible and praying every day, helps to keep the focus.

This particular verse, Revelation 14:13, focuses our attention on our blessed hope of everlasting life. In contrast to the wicked who “worship the beast and his image” who “have no rest day nor night” (Rev. 14:11), there is blessed rest for the saints who patiently endure, for those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14.12). Those who die in the Lord will rest from

their labors. The Office for the Burial of the Dead at the time of the Committal (BCP p.333) appoints Revelation 14:13 to be said or sung, as it proclaims this blessing. We may rejoice at the grave because “the strife is o’er, the battle done, the victory of life is won” (Hymn 91, 1940 Hymnal). Those who die in the Lord have now finished their course in faith, and graduated from the Church Militant to the Church Expectant.

They no longer fight against the world. No longer are they tempted by the vain idols of the world, like riches, power, or fame. They no longer fight against the flesh. Gone is the inner torment of the old man of sin and its proclivity for pride, envy, greed, gluttony, lust, wrath, or sloth. They no longer fight the devil. They are beyond the reach of the demons and can no longer be harassed by the lies and accusations of the evil one.

We can rejoice because now no torment can touch them, no one on earth can take advantage of them, steal from them, victimize them, or hurt them. They are safe now and can rest. They are beyond the sufferings of this life, physical and mental, and are comforted in paradise where God himself “will wipe all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17).

There the body hath no torment,  
There the mind is freed from care,  
There is ev’ry voice rejoicing,  
Ev’ry heart is loving there.

(Hymn 129, 1940 Hymnal)

Canon Steven Dart  
Rector of Christ Anglican Church  
Carefree, AZ

# Advent 2 - Friday, December 12

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Isaiah 24:16-23

*“Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.”*

(Isaiah 24:23)

**I**n August we celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ. In the Mass we heard from St. Peter, who was one of the witnesses of the fashion of Jesus’ countenance being altered: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (II Peter 1:16). With James and John, Peter observed the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” The heavenly bodies cannot but bow to the brightness of the uncreated Light, “thou Day-spring from on high.” The ancients, represented by Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets), cannot but bow before the Lord God of Israel, Who “in ancient times did give the Law, in cloud, and majesty, and awe.” On Advent I we asked, with the children of the Hebrews, “Who is this?” as Jesus made His entry into the City to cleanse the Temple (St. Matthew 21:10). This Sunday, Advent II, we hear Him say, “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (St. Luke 21:33). Who is this? It is Lord God “whom ye seek”

coming suddenly into His Temple (Malachi 3:1) and Whose word “endureth for ever in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

The Lord of Hosts is Jesus Christ. On Christmas He shall reign before His ancients gloriously when He lies in the Manger-Throne in Bethlehem, the City of David. On Mt. Tabor He reigns before His ancients when Moses and Elijah “appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Having thus accomplished, “God also hath exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Under this mighty reign we live until “they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (St. Luke 21:27). In the First Advent, Christ has come *in carne* - in our flesh. In the Last Advent, Christ will return *ad judicium* - to judge. The Advent In-between, in which Christ reigns in glory from His Altar-Throne in the Eucharist and reigns in the hearts of His faithful People by the Holy Spirit (*in mente* - into our very souls), is the Advent that practically concerns His People in the *anni Domini*. And “knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Romans 13:11).

Father Kevin Fife, SSC  
Rector of Saint James On-the-Glebe  
Gloucester, VA

## Advent 2 - Saturday, December 13

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 4:30ff

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

(Mark 4:30-32)

Jesus is teaching here about the mustard seed, symbolizing the small beginnings of faith that can grow into something great. Instead of describing a towering mountain, mighty river, or a majestic oak tree, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed! Jesus uses the image of something small to teach us about something bigger than we can fully comprehend. Just as Jesus came from small beginnings he accomplished much.

The mustard seed symbolizes faith, illustrating how even a small amount can lead to great outcomes in the hands of God. We should not judge what God is doing by how it appears at the onset of the working of the Spirit. We should hold our judgement until we see the finished product. Jesus uses the seed to demonstrate the Kingdom of God's growth from humble beginnings. The Jewish world expected a warrior that would come on a great steed and break the Roman empire. Instead they got a humble man speaking in love in order to draw men to repentance. The parable

emphasizes the transformative power of faith in one's life. It encourages us as believers to trust in God's ability to produce significant results from small acts of faith. The imagery of the mustard plant highlights the idea of shelter and refuge for others, reflecting community and support. Overall, the message conveys hope and the potential for growth in spiritual life. The parable of the mustard seed is about the advancement of God's kingdom and how God uses what seems like little things to accomplish big things.

So, what can we learn about the Kingdom of God from this parable? Is. 55:11 tells us "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." When the Lord calls on you to speak His word, don't worry about whether or not you are ready, He will lead you. You are capable, with the help of the Holy Spirit, of accomplishing great things from humble beginnings. The disciples are a perfect example of great things coming out of humble beginnings when mixed with faith and being led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus took a boy's small lunch and used it to miraculously feed thousands. God took a small family to build an ark for the coming flood. God used a forgotten man named Moses who lived in the wilderness to lead God's people out of slavery. God used a young boy with a sling shot to defeat Goliath. God used a little baby born in a stable to save the world. Never underestimate the power of little things in the Kingdom.

Deacon Clyde Wilkins  
Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church  
Warner Robins, GA

# Advent 3 - Sunday, December 14

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 1:57ff

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited  
and redeemed his people.”*

(Luke 1:68)

**T**he New Testament opens during a long night before the dawn. Israel had waited in silence for God, living through foreign occupation and longing for liberation. With the Nativity of John the Baptist, the subject of this morning’s second lesson, we begin to see God’s ancient promises stirring again. Zechariah’s voice returns when he names his son John (“God is gracious”). John’s birth marks the threshold of fulfillment, the bridge between Old and New. His ministry reminds us that God is faithful, that his Word unites both covenants, and that his coming brings light and peace.

John’s ministry reveals God’s faithfulness to the promises that he made to Abraham and David. In his great song, the Benedictus, Zechariah praises “the oath which he swore to our forefather Abraham” and “a mighty salvation for us, in the house of his servant David.” Despite the appearance of something radically new, this is the same story told from the beginning. God’s love does not change; the new thing he brings about in Christ fulfills the old. In Advent, we return to this liminal space between promise and fulfillment to remember that his mercy endures through generations and finds its ultimate expression in Christ. We too live in an in-between time between Christ’s first and second comings. Advent invites us to trust that the God

who kept his word to Israel will remain faithful to the promises he made to his Church.

John has been called the last Old Testament prophet because he bridges the Testaments by pointing to Christ. He is the “voice crying in the wilderness” who cries “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (Mark 1:3). Zechariah foresees his son’s mission: “Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” John prepares the way by calling the people of Israel to repentance so they can be prepared to encounter “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Advent calls us to the same by looking backward and forward at the same time: backward to the mystery of the Incarnation, forward to his coming in glory. In this season, we are called to self-examination, confession, and repentance so that we resume the way of peace through reconciliation with God and neighbor.

The Nativity of John the Baptist proclaims God’s faithfulness. Because of that faithfulness, John stood between the two covenants, heralding the Light that gives life to the world. As we meditate on his birth this Third Sunday in Advent, we remember that the Church is also called to bear prophetic witness by proclaiming Christ crucified for the remission of sins and turning hearts to God. Let us echo Zechariah’s words in our own time and place: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.”

Father Wesley Walker  
Rector of Saint Paul’s Anglican Church  
Crownsville, MD

# Advent 3 - Monday, December 15

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 5:1-20

*“But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,*

*And cried with a loud voice, and said, ‘What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.’”*

(Mark 5:6-7)

**A**nyone who has been on a standard Holy Land tour will recall the experience of having arrived by bus at the Sea of Galilee. While traversing the highway that follows the coastline, the thought that most have as they look out their windows is that this is not so much a “sea” as a lake. Things are smaller than one might think in Israel, and it seems that the closeness encouraged by children’s Sunday School felt-board displays might not be too far from accurate. At one point, the hillsides on the east coast become remarkably steep and the story of the Gadarene demoniac is told by the tour guide in the setting of the actual location, the region of Gadara. The reality of Jesus’ exorcism there is as close and as immanent as your hand in front of your face. And what a scene it must have been.

Not just a demon, but a legion of demons were forced into a pathetic scene of public pleading for mercy from Jesus. What a surprise! They had never met their match before. They had never been forced to genuflect before. They had never been forced to acknowledge their true eternally-defeated position before. They had never known the advent of the Son of God, the advent of Jesus Christ, the

advent of God incarnate. But on the day of Jesus' advent to that region, when He came and encountered the the famously-possessed Gadarene, it was not for a light conversation. There was no coy back and forth about the timing of his arrival as with Herod. There were no mind games as with the Pharisees. Certainly there was no wrestling match between equals. Instead, the legion of demons displayed their perfect grasp of the meaning of the advent of our Lord. His advent meant Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell were immanent.

For some, it is a difficult thing to think of Advent as a penitential season. At a time when we are anticipating Christmas festivities, the burdens we commonly bear are lists of preparations for holiday visitors, gift exchanges, and complicated dinners. Perhaps we may be surprised to learn that if these are our only concerns, then the legion of demons Jesus encountered in Gadarene had a better understanding of the situation than we do.

The Advent themes of Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell are not morose contemplations during a season of childlike treats and distraction. Rather, these themes describe the realities of the advent of our Lord. It will be on that day as it was in Gadara centuries ago. The day of the Lord will be upon us as it was for the Gadarene.

Let us traverse the remaining days of this Advent season with hearts clear about what we are preparing for. The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and he is surely coming again. It will be a day of power, awe, salvation, and godly fear. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Father Paul Rivard

Rector of Saint George the Martyr Anglican Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 3 - Tuesday, December 16

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## Morning Prayer - Psalm 90

*“So teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”*

(Psalm 90:12)

**I**n the calendar of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, one will find a simple Latin phrase marking the entry for December 16th: O Sapientia. This indicates the beginning of a series of antiphons—short chants meant to focus one’s attention—that are sung before and after the canticle Magnificat at Evening Prayer from December 16th until December 23rd. Known as the “Great O Antiphons,” they form the basis of the popular 19th-century carol “O come, O come Emmanuel”—though they date back a full millennium before that carol. These antiphons go through a litany of names applied by Holy Scripture to the Son of God. This first of these antiphons, O Sapientia, reads: “O Wisdom, which camest out of the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to another mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.”

It is providential that Psalm 90 should fall on December 16th this year, as this Psalm is a preeminent hymn to Divine Wisdom. The Psalm begins with a confession of God’s absolute stability. Divine Wisdom is the one who reaches “from one end to another,” the mighty refuge holding all generations within a single span of providence. We see in this opening verse the eternal Word—the Logos, the creative Wisdom “which camest out of the mouth of the Most High”

—preparing to enter his world. He is “from everlasting to everlasting,” the one which “sweetly ordereth all things,” come not to annihilate time, but to transfigure it.

The Psalmist tells us that man is turned to destruction: the death of Adam which has passed upon all men by sin. Our life is but as a dream—“so soon passeth it away, and we are gone.” Yet, Wisdom calls, “come again, ye children of men.” That is, come back to the One who will restore what was lost, will give joy and peace where heretofore has been only wrath and chaos. And here is the hinge of the Psalm: “So teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” To “number our days” is not mere arithmetic, but it is to see our days as God sees them—to discern within the span of our lives the pattern of Divine Wisdom. It is to know that each moment given us is a thread in the tapestry that the Eternal Word is weaving through history. And when we have thus successfully applied our hearts to wisdom, we will enter upon the way of prudence prayed for in the antiphon.

And finally, as we embark on this way of prudence, we will soon be satisfied with mercy. This soon is the morning of comfort that follows the night of sorrow. It is the dawning of the Dayspring in our hearts, Wisdom risen with healing in his wings. This morning is Christ himself, the Light who enlightens them that sit in darkness, and guides our feet into the way of peace.

Father C. Lance Davis, SSC  
Vicar of All Saints Anglican Catholic Church  
Aiken, SC

# Advent 3 - Ember Wednesday, December 17

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 12:35-48

*“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”*

(Luke 12:35,36)

**O**n this day in the midst of Advent, we may very well look around and think that prayer and fasting is the farthest thing from what this Wednesday in December is about. Stores are brightly adorned with Christmas signage, encouraging us to purchase gifts for others and even for ourselves. Christmas food is available in abundance, not just for purchase, but shared around tables and firesides, between friends and family, coworkers and fellow churchgoers. The Advent Season can seem obscured behind a haze of glitter, sparkles, and sugar.

Advent, though, is not quite the same as Lent. This is a period of joyful preparation. We rightly celebrate the coming of the Christ Child in the manger at Bethlehem as we look forward to Our Lord’s second coming, when he appears in His glory.

In the Gospel reading at Morning Prayer today, Our Lord enjoins us: “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the world was not ready, His people were not ready. His birth

passed quietly, mostly unnoticed by the world. His second coming will not be so. As the hymn says, “Ev’ry eye shall now behold him, Robed in dreadful majesty.” We are to be ready, for we do not know when Our Lord will come. We do not know the day and time of our deaths. We do not know the day when Our Lord will show himself to all men, and the King of Kings will be all in all.

We do not know when this day will be, for that is known only to the Father. Yet it is the day we look forward to with a great joy, on which gives the silver lining to our clouds of sadness. Even in this Vale of Tears, we give thanks to God for the Incarnation. We praise the Lord for his birth in Bethlehem and his life amongst us. We rejoice in His Virgin Mother, who is Israel as she ought to have been. We sing the praises of Christ, our High Priest, who died and rose again, and ascended into Heaven. We wait with earnest joy for his return, and find our rest in his Sacrament of Love, whereby he is present to His people, even to the end of the world.

As we come to this Ember Wednesday, the midpoint of Advent, taking a pause before we take the final plunge towards Bethlehem, how are we keeping our lights burning? What am I doing to be watchful? Today we fast and pray for those preparing for Holy Orders. We can join to this a prayer for our own discernment: How is the Lord calling me to journey with him? How is he preparing me for heaven, for himself? When the Lord knocks, how will he find us?

Father Zachary Braddock, SSC  
Rector of The Anglican Cathedral Church of the Epiphany  
Columbia, SC

# Advent 3 - Thursday, December 18

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Mark 6:1-6

*“From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?”*

(Mark 6:2)

**I**n the synoptic Gospels, it is clear there is a connection between faith and miracles. One of the most dramatic expressions of this connection is Jesus’ teaching, “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matthew 21:21). Today’s Lesson approaches this theme from the opposite direction. “And [Jesus] could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6: 5-6a).

It is obvious Jesus was not expecting this kind of reception. Why did the people of his own city reject him? It is clear their initial reaction was very positive. “When the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, “From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?” (Mark 6:2). They doubtless knew something about his miracles, for example, just before journeying to Nazareth, Jesus had performed one of his most spectacular miracles, raising Jairus’ daughter. He had tried to prevent the word of this miracle from spreading, but it doubtless did.

Nevertheless, their initial reception quickly changed. They began to question just who Jesus was, to have such wisdom and power. “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.” In other words, how should we credit a local man, one whom we have known since he was a young child, as being a holy man? In essence they were asking: Isn’t he just a common ordinary fellow who makes his living with his hands like the rest of us?

Jesus summarized their rejection simply, “A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.” Perhaps many of us have had the experience of having made a suggestion which was ignored, only to be quickly accepted when it was made by a consultant (a man from out of town with a briefcase.) It is unfortunate, but often the reality is “familiarity breeds contempt.” This is something we all need to beware of. One example of this is Bible Study. I call it the “oh yeah” response. We begin to read a familiar passage, and something comes into our mind like “Oh yeah, this the one where Jesus does so-and-so,” and if we aren’t careful, we can just skim through it instead of going deep. It is perhaps understandable, but dangerous. The reality is the riches of scripture are inexhaustible. Careful reading will almost always be rewarded with some new insight. As you are doing your Daily Office, watch out for the “Oh yeah” response and challenge yourself to wrestle with the passage, as Jacob wrestled with God and received a blessing.

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

# Advent 3 - Ember Friday, December 19

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - 2 Timothy 3:14-4:8

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

*That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

(2 Timothy 3:17-18)

**A**dvent comes to us at the core of our human experience, where we really exist. It provides an honest voice to the “horrible pit” and “miry clay” that we are all too familiar with, those times of individual hardship, disappointment, and a world that cries out for salvation. Passive perseverance is not the goal of this sacred waiting. It is a patient, active cry that comes from the very center of who we are. The profound certainty that God is listening to us is the first miracle of this season rather than instant responses. He is neither aloof nor disconnected. He hears. He approaches our hurting souls. Our desire is a prayer in and of itself, and God is already listening and pledging to put our feet on the rock.

But in the quiet, what can we hear? There are conflicting voices all around us, the “chaff” of hollow consolations and false assurances. Advent invites us to pay attention to God’s authentic Word. His Word is like a fire that refines our dreams and extinguishes mistaken conceptions of what the Messiah will be; it is not like a harmless dream. It is a hammer that prepares a tender and receptive heart by shattering the rock of our independence. In order to mold

our desire in accordance with His will, we beg God to quiet the clamor and speak His faithful, cleansing Word as we wait.

The astounding reality that God has already promised us transforms our waiting. As a beginning step toward future redemption, he has given us the Spirit. This is the hope of Advent for Christians. We are waiting for the One whose presence we have already experienced, not for a stranger. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” as a result. The new life of reconciliation has begun, while the old life of the pit is dying. Instead of being completely hopeless, we wait from a position of accomplished victory.

So we wait, as new creatures rather than as individuals without hope. The assurance of the Spirit echoes in our hearts while we wait. We await the complete manifestation of the reconciliation that was started in the manger and completed on the cross. Let your waiting be a prayer on this Ember Friday. Rest in the hope of the new creation that is both here and still to come; trust that God hears your plea, and embrace His refining Word.

Father Ory Schultheis  
Assistant Priest of Christ Anglican Church  
Carefree, AZ

## Advent 3 - Ember Saturday, December 20

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Morning Prayer - Psalm 42,43

*“Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.”*  
(Psalm 42:1)

**P**salms 42 and 43, united by their refrain and theme, form a single, continuous lament of the soul yearning for the presence of God. Together, they express the profound spiritual thirst of one who has been separated from the sanctuary, yet whose faith endures amid desolation. The psalmist, traditionally regarded as a son of Korah, lays bare the movements of the heart in seasons of exile, when God seems distant and the soul is cast down. Yet even in sorrow, these psalms are suffused with hope, for faith clings to the assurance that the living God will yet be praised.

The opening cry of Psalm 42 is among the most poignant in all of Scripture: “Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.” Here, the psalmist employs the image of a deer, parched and desperate, longing for the refreshing streams. So the faithful soul thirsts not for earthly comfort, but for the life-giving presence of God Himself. This longing is not sentimental; it is the expression of spiritual necessity, for as St. Augustine reminds us, the soul was made for God, and nothing else can satisfy its thirst.

Yet the psalmist laments, “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they daily say unto me, where is now thy God?” (vs.3). The taunts of unbelievers pierce deeply when the sense of divine nearness is withdrawn. Memory only sharpens the sorrow, for he recalls the days when he went joyfully with the multitude to the house of God, with songs of praise among the throng. Now exiled and alone, his heart is overwhelmed. Still, he turns from complaint to self-

exhortation: “O put thy trust in God; for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God” (vs. 7).

This refrain, repeated throughout both of this morning’s Psalms, speaks to perseverance in affliction. The psalmist does not deny his sorrow, but he speaks truth to his troubled heart. He reminds himself of God’s steadfast love and holds fast to the promise of renewed joy. Faith must reason with fear; hope must rebuke despair.

Psalm 43 is particularly appropriate for Ember Saturday, one of the days the Church is called to pray for seminarians and clergy, because it is recited by clergy and acolytes in the preparation prayers before Mass. In it, the psalmist’s cry opens with a prayer for vindication and restoration: “Give sentence with me, O God, and defend my cause against the ungodly people.” He appeals to God’s truth and light, beseeching that they might lead him once more to the holy hill, to the altar of God, “even unto the God of my joy and gladness” (vs. 4). His desire is not for deliverance alone, but for communion--the restoration of fellowship with the living God. Thus the psalm ends as it began, in longing and in faith: “Why art thou so heavy, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God; for I will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance, and my God” (vss. 5-6).

These psalms speak to every Christian who has known spiritual desolation--the dark night when prayer seems unanswered and God’s face hidden--feelings not unknown to clergy and seminarians. Yet their refrain teaches us that hope is not extinguished by sorrow. The same God who seems distant is the One who will restore the light of His countenance. Therefore, let our souls take courage, for the thirst that aches within it shall one day be satisfied in the living streams of God’s eternal presence.

Father Richard Bugyi-Sutter, SSM  
Assisting at Saint George the Martyr Anglican Church  
Simpsonville, SC

# Advent 4 - Sunday, December 21

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 3:1-17

*“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”*

(Luke 3:9)

**W**e live in a time when the human heart seems so far removed from any need to seek out and find God. Our idolatries conceal the knowledge of God. John the Baptist, bearing the spirit of Elijah, calls us away from our idolatry. Anything that claims our time, attention, and money more than God is an idol or false god. Anything that possesses and owns us more than God is an idol. The idol could be a political platform, a romantic notion, or even a limited but noble cause like the church. It could be a large house, an expensive car, an obsession with money, or an addiction to another person. The idol could be the narcissistic self and the will to power. None of these things must ever claim our hearts more than our search for God. If any one of these things stands between us and the quest, it must be tamed.

The 13th-century Latin philosophers used to call it *Itinerarium mentis in deum* or the mind's journey into God. The phrase was made famous by St. Bonaventure's book with this title. It strikes us as odd since we postmodern sloth-ridden lukewarm pseudo-Christians prefer the immediate gratification of a *fait accompli*. Ours is a religion

that puts the assurance of salvation before any moral effort required to reach it. But the Medievals had it right since salvation always hangs in the balance. We might be saved, or we might be damned. So, what better way of understanding the Christian religion than as a quest? We are meant to be questing after God through a life full of learning and habituation to the Good. Seeking knowledge and virtue as a habit of life keeps the soul humbly disposed to the Good, which we have not yet reached.

John Baptist helps us in this endeavor on this last Sunday of Advent. His doctrine is necessarily rigorous. He calls us into spiritual death before the birth. Bear fruits that befit repentance, he cries, for even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (St. Matthew iii. 8, 10). The Baptist prepares us for the vision of God in the birth of His Son. The good fruit is the crop of repentance and self-emptying. The good fruit is the desire to receive God's Grace anew in the child of Bethlehem. With St. Bonaventure, John would have us to be questing continually after God in Jesus as we die to ignorance and come alive to the new birth of God's Son, not as a museum piece of history but as the Word made flesh in us for salvation. Christ, the Word made flesh, is always tentative and not assured as practically useful to His creatures unless the life of pilgrimage is reflected in the persistent intention to be habituated to His truth and power.

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

# Advent 4 - Monday, St. Thomas the Apostle (transferred), December 22

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Morning Prayer - First Lesson - Job 42:1-6

*“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”*

(Job 42:5-6)

**D**oubting Thomas. The cynical disciple who was low on faith and blunt in speech is the foil amongst the foils. The disciples are the Greek chorus that stands in for us in the narrative, asking the questions and sometimes playing the fool, so that our Lord can instruct them, and through them us. Thomas does that and more, he gives voice to the thoughts that not only are we too embarrassed to speak, but even too embarrassed to think.

St. Thomas brashly states that he won't believe in the risen Lord except he “put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side.” But it is a blessing that he did give voice to our doubts.

Because Jesus can take our doubts and turn them into a powerful witness for himself. Christian art often portrays Thomas doing exactly what he demanded—touching our Lord's wounds—yet the Gospel text never explicitly says that he did. Yes, Jesus offers his hands and side to Thomas to be examined, but the Doubter, who was so brash a week earlier, now falls on his knees and declares, “my Lord and my God,” to Jesus.

It is the sight of Jesus that brings about faith.

We are nearing the Feast of the Nativity. Why do we commemorate the Doubter so near to this great Feast? The Nativity is the feast of beholding God. Technically, the Incarnation began on March 25th. But December 25th is the feast of Revelation. The God who was hidden in the Virgin's womb is now revealed to be seen by all.

Thomas is all of us—and Jesus is addressing us, behold my hands...be not faithless, but believing. The Nativity is the Feast of beholding. He comes to heal our unbelief, he comes to heal our doubts, and our faithlessness.

Like we read in the passage from Job, Thomas is overwhelmed in the presence of God. That's a powerful contemplation as we prepare for Christmastide. God's presence is overwhelming.

At Christmas, for the first time, humanity will look at humanity in the face of God. The hands, the feet, the side that we first see in Bethlehem we know will be pierced for our redemption.

We too are invited to be in the presence of Jesus. Our Lord remains with us, in the blessed Sacrament. Jesus understands we have doubts, that we need his reassurance, and in the Mass, we are invited to behold him that taketh away the sins of the world.

Father Matthew Harlow, SSC  
Rector of Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church  
Warner Robins, GA

# Advent 4 - Tuesday, December 23

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Morning Prayer - Second Lesson - Luke 1:26-38

*“And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”*

(St. Luke 1:33)

**R**ecently I have been reading through the Old Testament histories, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. They tell the story of how God chose David to be king over Israel, and how his successors made a mess of it. In only the second generation after David, the kingdom divides into two: Israel, the northern kingdom, and Judah, the southern kingdom, which continues to be ruled by a direct descendant of David until its fall to Babylon. In the north, Israel sees a revolving door of kings and dynasties. Every time a new king usurps the throne, the reader thinks, “Maybe this one will turn out to be a good king.” But he doesn’t; every single king of Israel after it departs from the house of David winds up being wicked. Now the kings of Judah, the successors of David, aren’t all that much better themselves, and most of them are wicked as well. But there are a few bright spots, a handful of kings who actually strive to follow the Lord as their forefather David did, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. They serve in the histories to remind us that the hope is in the throne of David, the man chosen by God. When we depart from God’s plan, we open ourselves to chaos and disappointment; but our hope is in the Heir of David.

On “Christmas Eve Eve” of this year, we read of that Heir who will finally come and restore the throne of his father David; but as we hear the words of St. Gabriel in the Annunciation, we know that this restoration will be a spiritual rather than a temporal kingdom. The worst chaos and disappointment that we struggle with is not the political machinations of rival claimants, but rather the sin of my own heart trying to usurp Christ from his rightful place there. In this new Kingdom, we will be restored to union with God the Holy Trinity, whose very nature is interpersonal love. (In fact, the first revelation of God as Three-in-One is to the Blessed Virgin in St. Luke 1:35.) The whole of the Old Testament, not just a few books, is the story of man trying to take God off the throne and put himself there instead.

In chapter 14 of his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis explains that, in the history of the Jewish people, God is refining mankind to prepare for his own Advent. That story “does not tell of a human search for God at all, but of something done by God, for, to, and about Man.” That statement, again, could sum up the entire Bible. He concludes his description of this refinement in one of his most moving passages, which is especially appropriate to read along with today’s lessons. “The process grows narrower and narrower, sharpens at last into one small bright point like the head of a spear. It is a Jewish girl at her prayers. All humanity (so far as concerns its redemption) has narrowed to that.”

Father Paul Sterne, SSC  
Chaplain of the C. S. Lewis Student Center  
Columbia, SC

# Christmas Eve - Wednesday, December 24

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Evening Prayer - Second Lesson - Matthew 1:18ff

*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.”*

(Matthew 1:18)

**A**s St. Symeon the New Theologian wrote, “God is fire and when He came into the world he became man.” God became man and the man, Jesus, was the living fire of Divine love. And, like the Burning Bush, the Fire of God’s love flamed out of the heart of Jesus, but no limb or leaf of God’s creation was singed by that dazzling flame. Indeed, the heart of the creature was set afire by the Presence of our Incarnate God. “Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened up the Scriptures,” declare the Emmaus disciples. The fire of God’s love kindles within his children a love and longing and yearning for God.

What a world we live in! What a creation God has fashioned! But I must confess, I have to ask, as I do every year on Christmas, why on earth has God Almighty committed himself to the material world – to clunky matter? I do not know. What is more baffling than matter and in particular the matter of our bodies of flesh? One’s body of flesh certainly lets one know what it wants and when it wants it – one’s body stirs up one’s self absorption. A little pain, a little toothache, and I can think of nothing else. Our bodies know where happiness is found; at least it feels that way. And yet the existential reality is that our bodies betray us.

Our flesh knows our immediate needs and it manipulates our emotions; our hope waxes with youthful vitality and then droops with our sagging, aging bodies. Certainly, I am

not merely my body, but I am not me without my body. We are odd creatures; a jumble of matter, mind, spirit and intelligence and passions – faculties that are not as unified and harmonious as we would like; but rather, as a person, one seems frequently to be at war with one's self.

The Beloved Disciple writes: "The Word became flesh..." This is what that means: God is not a utilitarian. Jesus did not throw away his flesh once his earthly work was finished. True God, the Second Person of the Trinity, assumed true humanity into his divine life once and for all; he is now our flesh and blood forever and ever.

God's answer to evil is baffling: His Only Begotten Son was made as vulnerable, as contingent, as weak and opened to death as any of us. I still do not understand why God loves flesh, but he does. He has anchored our flesh, our created DNA, in his divine life – his unlimited power, his perfect beauty, goodness and his perfect love has covered our human flesh with everlasting glory. The immutable, unchangeable, invisible God has become visible and he has entered so completely into our life that God has personally experienced human suffering himself as a real human being.

Through Christ, God has given birth to a New Family in his old creation. And he has built his Family a Home of their own which is Holy Mother Church. Through the sacrament of baptism children are born into that New Family. A Man, a Human Being of flesh, is seated, this very moment, upon the Throne of the Universe. But before that, on the night we will soon memorialize, God Almighty, in the form of a baby in swaddling cloths, made of Mary's lap the all-sufficient Throne of his Divinity.

Father Glenn Spencer  
Rector Emeritus of All Saints Anglican Church  
Charlottesville, VA

# Christmas Day

## Thursday, December 25

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The Christmas Letter  
of  
Bishop Chandler Holder Jones

Dearly beloved in Christ,

**A** truly joyful, blessed, and holy Christmas to you! On this most sacred day, let us consider precisely what it is we celebrate!

Our Redemption is achieved in Our Lord Jesus Christ because in the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son, God the Word, the only-begotten Son of God, assumed true and integral human nature of the Blessed Virgin Mary and was made true Man. “Only that which God assumes does He redeem.” If Our Lord had not assumed a true human nature identical to our own and taken upon Himself true human flesh and spirit, He could not have saved us or redeemed us, for what He came to heal, restore, repair, divinise, and transform was our own very nature, the reality of our humanity. Had He not become true Man in every aspect and way, sin being the sole exception, He could not have united the substance of our humanity to the substance of His divinity and thus raise our human nature into perfect communion with God.

Thus Christ took upon Himself a true, created, physical, material, and natural humanity. “God became Man so that man may become God.” In the Incarnation, Our Lord fully restores the Image and Likeness of God in man, which had been marred and injured by Adam’s transgression; through

Christ's human nature in the Church and Sacraments, we receive Him. And thus our own human nature, united to His in the Mystical Body of the Church through Baptism and in the Sacramental Body in the Eucharist, is replenished and nourished with divine life through the Holy Ghost. In this mysterious gift, we are enabled both to grow in holiness, virtue, and love, and to allow the Likeness to God to be entirely recreated in us personally. Our human members become the members of Christ the Man in His Body, of which He is the risen and living Head.

At the Annunciation, the miraculous and virginal Conception of Our Lord, the Logos or Word recreated human nature in the womb of the Blessed Mother by the Holy Ghost and assumed from Mary a perfect, sinless, immaculate, and complete human nature, a human body, mind, spirit, and soul. God put on flesh and took human nature into the Godhead by His hypostatic union: in the One Divine Person of God the Son exists from the instant of the Annunciation and forever two perfect, distinct, and united natures, divine and human. The human nature assumed by Christ was created directly by Him in the body of Mary without human intervention or seed, no human father, so that the humanity of Our Lord is the New Creation. Our Lord is called the New Adam, the Second Adam and Lord from heaven (I Corinthians 15.47) because God the Son became truly human and united perfectly with His divine nature a completely renovated and restored human nature.

Our Lord's human nature was not pre-existent, but fashioned by God in the mystery of the Incarnation. By the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, Our Lady conceived a human nature to which Our Lord was inseparably and

instantly united and one which is identical to our own. In this union, Our Lord's divine nature was not changed and our human nature in Him was made whole and returned to its original state.

Notice the Church teaches that Our Lord assumed human nature, an "impersonal" human existence composite of body and soul like our own, but not a human person. This is because Our Lord Jesus Christ is not a God-possessed man, a human personality in which the Logos dwells as in a temple. Our Lord is not merely a saint or God-inhabited human person, but is God made flesh, God made Man. The one and only Person of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Divine Word, the Eternal Son of God, not a human person united to a Divine Person. The belief that Jesus of Nazareth is a distinct human person indwelt by another distinct person, the Divine Logos, is the heresy attributed to Nestorius of Constantinople and condemned by Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in AD 431. Nestorianism professes there are two persons in Our Lord joined in a moral union: Jesus the man and Christ the Divine Word. Nestorians often use the heretical phrase 'two persons in one personality' to describe a Word-Man Christology at odds with the Gospel and the Catholic Faith. Jesus is not two persons in one organism, but One Person with two natures, of one nature with the Father in His Deity and of one nature with us in His humanity.

The divine and human natures are united in the One Person of Our Lord without 'confusion, change, division, or separation.'

The Orthodox teaching is that Our Lord is One Person in two natures, human and divine, as taught by the Fourth

Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon AD 451. There is one 'Who' (the Word) and two 'Whats' (divine and human natures) in the Person of Our Blessed Saviour.

Monophysitism, condemned by Chalcedon, teaches the opposite error of Nestorianism, to wit, that Our Lord has only one nature which is divine. The term Monophysite means "one nature" (*mono phusis*). Monophysites hold that Christ's human nature was absorbed by his divine, as the heresiarch Eutyches proclaimed, "like a drop of water in the ocean." This heterodox doctrine denies the true humanity of Our Lord, as Nestorianism denies the true divinity of the Incarnate Logos.

Thus the womb of Our Lady is the new Garden of Eden, Paradise, and Our Lord is the New Adam, whose human nature is the recreation of human nature free of original and actual sin, untainted by moral corruption, concupiscence, and the spiritual ravages of the Fall of man. Christ the New Man, sinless and Virgin-born, possesses a human nature given to Him by the Holy Ghost through the Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin Mary is one through whom the human race has been offered the gift of a regenerated human nature liberated from sin, for from her Christ's new human nature presents us with the total renewal of human life, like that of Adam before the Fall, yes, but even higher.

For in Christ, the substance of our mortal flesh has been deified and united to the Godhead in perfect communion and union. Our Lord raises human nature to a level never experienced by or realised in Adam, for in Christ, our human nature is shared by "One of the Holy Trinity" and thus is inserted into the perichoresis, the mutual indwelling and communal life and love, of the Holy Trinity. Christ our

God takes from us our humanity, with its loss of original justice and grace and communion with God and likeness to God, and gives us His humanity, effused with the fullness of divinity, in return, a divine exchange of love and grace. This human nature of Christ, the substance of our own humanity freed from sin, glorified by divine life, and full of the Holy Ghost, is communicated and applied to us in the Sacraments.

In Christ, from the moment of the Incarnation, exists the perfect union, personal union, of the One Divine Person of the Son and His regenerated human nature. God is forever Man in Jesus Christ and remains such for all eternity. But the human nature is indeed a created human nature, that is, a human nature generated and truly born from our nature. There were Monophysite heretics in the fourth and fifth centuries that held that Christ possesses an uncreated or heavenly human nature, heavenly flesh not derived of created human nature, but that error is based on a Gnostic denial that God truly took human flesh, was truly conceived and truly born in every way as we are but with the exemption of sin (Hebrews 4.15).

The Docetists and other early quasi-Christian Gnostics held Our Lord was but a phantom, an apparition, a heavenly being devoid of material flesh and blood who only appeared (*dokeo*) to be human, but did not possess a truly material physical human nature. Several early Gnostic heretical movements asserted Christ was truly divine but that He lacked a true and consubstantial human nature with us: such error vitiates the purpose and reality of the Incarnation. The Orthodox Catholic Faith maintains that Christ is consubstantial with us concerning His Manhood and consubstantial with the Father concerning His Deity

(Athanasian Creed). Jesus Christ is like us, therefore, in every way. He is Very God and Very Man. In Him, both natures exist distinctly, without fusion, mixture, and confusion, and yet are inseparable and interpenetrate each other in what we call the 'communication of idioms.' As the ancient Fathers describe the mystery, the Son's divine nature divinises His human nature "like iron in the fire." The iron and the fire remain distinct from each other, but each takes on the property of the other. Truly we can say therefore that God was born, performed miracles, hungered, thirsted, suffered, was crucified, died, was buried and rose again. And the humanity of that God-Man is now divine, resplendent with the glory and life of God.

The greatest Christmas gift of all is that same Manhood of Jesus Christ, offered to us in our Christmas Holy Communions.

Happy Christmas - God bless you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chandler Holder Jones SSC". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

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

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