

**Advent Daily Devotional
2016**

COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ABOUT THIS DEVOTIONAL

The illustrations on the cover and throughout this Advent devotional booklet display symbols that are traditionally associated with the Jesse Tree. The Jesse tree is an old tradition of telling the story of salvation from the beginning of God's covenant promises, through the people of Israel, to Jesus Christ. Often these symbols are decorations on a tree. The Jesse Tree is a teaching tool during the time of Advent. For more information about the illustrations, please visit www.rca.org/resources/jesse-tree-family-devotions.

We would like to recognize Brittany Fiscus van Rossum, 2017 and Stephanie Loftin, 2017 for editing the submissions for this devotional.

Thanks, as well, to all the writers for their contributions.

ADVENT GREETINGS TO YOU!

We are so grateful for the many ways in which you give yourself to Columbia Theological Seminary. The faithful support of a wide circle of friends is what makes it possible for us to fulfill our seminary's mission, to educate men and women for the sake of the Church and the world. The quality of the community here at Columbia is one of God's best gifts to us. We are daily grateful for the ways that we can learn and serve and worship together.

We are delighted to share a little of ourselves and hope you will enjoy this booklet of Advent devotionals written by a cross-section of our faculty, staff, and students. The themes of Advent are joy, peace, hope, and love. We pray that you will **receive** deep joy in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, **experience** deep peace in God's expansive grace for you and the whole world, **live** into deep hope for God's healing plan for a hurting world, and **walk** in ways of deep love, as Jesus himself showed us, for God, for neighbor, and for yourself.

As you consider your year-end giving, please bless us by including a gift to Columbia Theological Seminary's Annual Fund. Your gift makes a real and tangible difference to us. Without the support of our wide family of friends, we would not be able to form and shape leaders for your congregation or the many ministries that have perhaps touched your life.

We pray that joy and peace will be yours in abundance throughout this holy season of the year.

*Dr. Leanne Van Dyk
President*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

I met Joshua at a #BlackLivesMatter protest in 2014 following the murder of Michael Brown. He wore a t-shirt that read, “...**Stay woke!**”

While the phrase is not a direct reference to Paul’s words, the slogan captures the spirit of Paul’s encouragement that we must wake from our slumber. However, in this same letter Paul beseeches believers to submit to the authority of the Roman government, while Joshua’s t-shirt joins the chorus of activists calling for civil disobedience, reminding us that the dream of racial justice is far from a reality.

While Paul’s message of submission strikes a sour chord in our ears today, perhaps the message of this slogan is at the core of Paul’s concern. The hostility of empires has surfaced in multifarious ways: Jews being expelled from Rome, black people being killed by those who should protect them, the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine. For Paul,



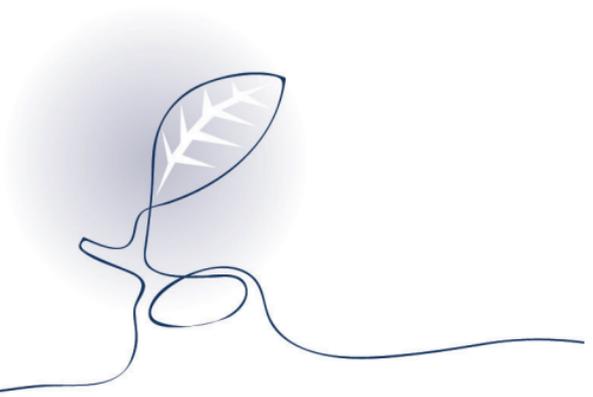
Romans 13:11-14

maybe submission was a sufficient tactic he encouraged to protect his readers. Such tactics will not suffice today. The blood of countless black humans is crying out from the ground, testifying that submission must give way to protest.

Wake up, friends! This advent season is a time to remember that salvation is nearer now than it has ever been before, and 'waiting' does not mean sitting still. Christ is coming in us! Christ is breaking in through us! Join in the anticipatory protests of the coming of our Lord and Liberator in unsuspected forms and uncondoned ways.

Stay woke!

Rev. Brandon T. Maxwell
Dean of Students



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016

I am very particular about advent calendars. They must have proper advent themes, and they must begin on the first Sunday of Advent (not December first), lest they be Christmas countdown calendars instead. In searching for true Advent calendars, one cannot help but notice how many are a depiction of the story of Noah's ark. At first this imagery may seem strangely inappropriate. But, think again; Noah's story is actually brimming with Advent themes.

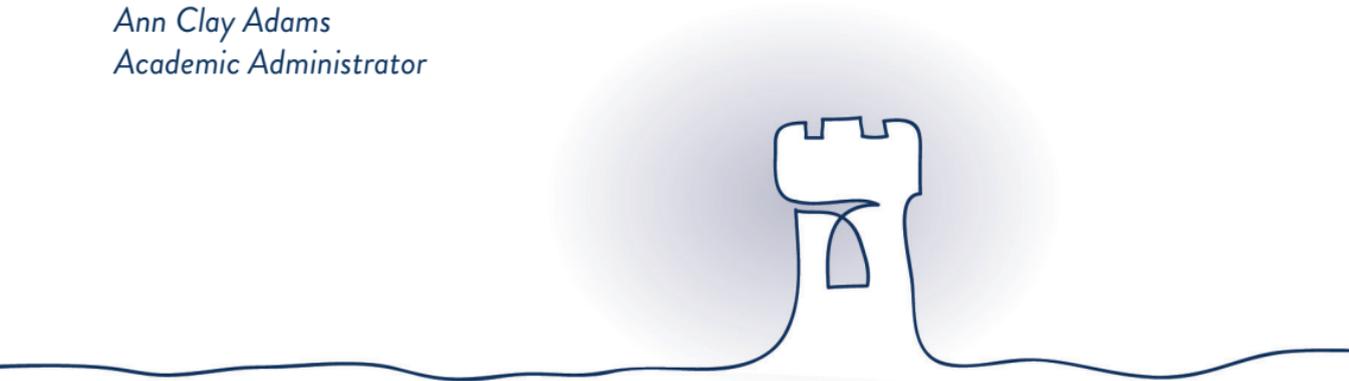
In all the brokenness and wickedness of the world, God remembers Noah and calls him to be part of something wondrous. God's plan is out of the ordinary and requires great preparation in the building of an ark. Noah, his family, and the animal kingdom wait nearly a year as they ride the ark into an uncertain but promised future. Noah sends

Genesis 8:1-19

out the raven and the dove repeatedly, with undimmed expectation, until that one time when the dove returns with a sign of life. Like a rose blooming in the desert, this sign of life points to the new reality drawing near. Finally, when the waters have subsided, and the new earth is visible, once again life begins to flourish in a new age under God's providential care.

In these early days of Advent, we are invited to ponder God coming to us throughout time and in the days that are still yet to be.

Ann Clay Adams
Academic Administrator



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2016

America in 2016 has been marked by fear, anxiety, sadness and outright anger. These emotions mar our election process, dominate the news, and find their way into our own homes.

As I imagine a diverse group of friends engaging this Psalm, it pains me to think of all the different ways these words are interpreted. I think of harsh words exchanged about refugees, terrorists, racial violence, and police brutality. We all possess fear of our enemies—real and perceived enemies are perhaps equally dangerous.



Psalm 124

Our tendency is to read this Psalm as if it explicitly justifies our own experience. But the context of the Psalm is important. For David and the Israelites, fear of the Philistines was persistent. For the Jews of Jesus' time there was a deep desire for a Messiah who could throw off the oppression of Rome. The deliverance that Jesus offered, however, is so much more. That deliverance confronts the structures of sin that run deeper than the foundations of any Roman road.

Are we really any different? We are witnesses to the Good News of Jesus, and still we get confused. We search for new would-be messiahs, rather than leaning on the One we have. Divisions deepen because we lose sight of the unifying love we share in Christ.

Wait! Wait and be faithful. Wait in hope for the true Messiah who heals our hearts, transforms our communities, and changes the world around and through us.

Michael Thompson
Director of Communications



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016

It's Advent again. Time for the apocalypse.

For those who follow a regular lectionary cycle, there is an irony in encountering Matthew's disorienting apocalyptic language about signs and omens, the darkening of sun and moon and falling of the stars. Though we cannot predict the coming of the Son of Man, we can predict with great certainty when we will read about it (if we read about it at all): at the beginning of Advent.

As predictable as the apocalypse may be in the lectionary, the images yet startle us: corpses and vultures, and what Stan Saunders calls "astral portents." And more: the words offer us two items of unexpected good news. First, we are not the first people on earth, nor the first followers of Jesus, to be anxious about the future. Some days this description of false messiahs and cosmic upheavals sounds frighteningly like our own news headlines, and we are desperate for a savior to rescue us from uncertainty. So were Jesus-followers in the first century. This does not make our problems any less real, but it does remind us that our fears are not new.



Matthew 24:23-35

Second, though we do not know when the “Son of Man” will return, Jesus tells his disciples that just when they are most tempted to succumb to fear, that is when they should trust that he is near. Not when the sun is shining, but when it is darkened: that is when he is at the gates.

Maybe this Advent, if we are tempted to succumb to our own fears about the ecological and political future, this is precisely when we need the good news of the apocalypse.

Dr. Martha Moore-Keish

Associate Professor of Theology and Director of ThM program



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016

We are one day closer to that glorious day when we will sing “Hallelujah,” Jesus Christ, Our Savior, is born! We are waiting, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed for, “that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.” Our present-day divided world is in deep need of healing, and God’s people anxiously wait for the Lord to come and wash away the stains on the earth. This season encourages us to keep hope. We hope just as the “survivors of Israel” for “the fruit of the land” to be our “pride and glory.” But what do we consider the “fruit of the land” today? The wonderful imagine in this Isaiah text of a tree laden with fruit, beautiful to behold, invites us to imagine a tree of healing and wholeness and health for our world today.



Isaiah 4:2-6

During this time of waiting, we cannot sit idly by! We must be active “waiters.” Jesus called us to take care of others and offer shelter to those in need. Jesus called us to build each other up, take away one another’s shame, truly see each other, all for the glory of God. On that day when we see good “fruit of the land,” we will be covered by a canopy that will serve to protect us and keep us safe. Be encouraged! Keep actively waiting and hoping. Know that the day of full glory is coming. Soon, we will even get a glimpse of it when we celebrate the birth of Christ, in whom we place our hope.

Sarah Smith
MDiv/MAPT 2017



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2016

New Christmas cards lie on my desk. They wait patiently to be signed and sent, their faces reflecting cozy manger scenes. The glittery words of hope, joy and peace seem incompatible with the realities of our world today: a polarized political climate, an increase in racial tensions across the country, a serious refugee crisis with far-reaching impacts. How can I consider sending messages of hope in a time when there is such unrest?

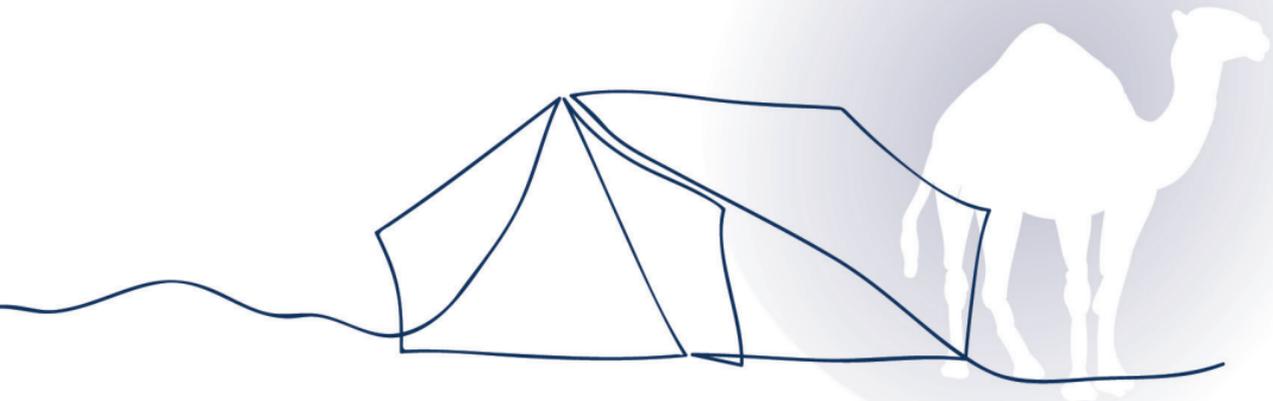
Isaiah 30 captures God's promise to restore prosperity and security to Israel. God will hear the cries of the people; the ground will produce plentifully; even the sun will shine more brightly in the sky. Isaiah reminds Israel that God gave the law to guide them and keep them safe. Isaiah recalls God's promise of providence: God will return to Israel and guide them. Israel will turn neither right nor left but will walk in the path that leads to abundant life.



Isaiah 30: 19-26

During Advent, we celebrate the birth of the One who embodied God's law and God's way. We anticipate the One who turned neither right nor left but faithfully followed the will of God. We eagerly await the only One able to bring wholeness to a broken world. May we pray this season, and always, that Christ will rule our hearts and actions and work through us to bring hope to the world.

Cassie Waits
MDiv 2017



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016

German hymn writer Johann Olearius set the text of Isaiah 40:1-5 into verse in 1671. Written in honor of St. John the Baptist Day, the song is evocative of the anticipated homecoming of the exile of Judah from Babylon:

Comfort, comfort ye my people,
speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness,
mourning 'neath their sorrow's load;
speak ye to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them;
tell her that her sins I cover,
and her warfare now is over.

Like Advent itself, the text from Isaiah is harrowing in both the culturally familiar sense—to vex and distress—and in the agricultural understanding of turning over the soil in anticipation of planting, new growth, and eventual harvest. In fact, “harrowing” and “harvest” both derive from the Old English word *Harwe*. Images of harrowed land can be bleak and distressing, yet remind us that the hope of harvest is near. It is here we discover those threshold times and places between where we have been and where we are going.



Isaiah 40:1-11

It is here that language may give way to silence. Such terrain redefines every boundary giving shape to one's life.

Advent is a season of both hopeful waiting and atonement—as Isaiah suggests, heralding both the humility akin to harrowed land and the anticipated good news of a well-tended harvest:

Make ye straight what long was crooked,
Make the rougher places plain,
Let your hearts be true and humble,
As befits God's holy reign;
For the glory of the Lord
Now o'er earth is shed abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token
That God's Word is never broken.

Dr. J. William Harkins
Senior Lecturer of Pastoral Theology and Care

Title: Comfort, Comfort Ye My People, Tune: Freu Dich Sehr, Composer: Louis Bourgeois (c. 1510-1561),
Author: Johann Olearius (1611-1684), Trans. Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878).



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

Advent is full of wonder. This wonder comes to us wrapped up in the typical trappings of the season—in vacation days and festive decorations, in music played and gifts exchanged. But as Psalm 72 reminds us, Advent is also a season in which we prepare for the one “who alone does wondrous things.”

The stirring doxology of verses 17-18 concludes what is a royal hymn, perhaps originally sung on the occasion of a king’s coronation. The petitions that populate the opening verses offer a poetic litany of hope for the monarch’s ensuing reign. Strikingly though, at the center of this litany is not the deeds of a great and mighty king but the wondrous works of the God who sustains him. Because of this God, justice will abide with the poor and peace abound in creation; oppressors will be turned back and mountains yield the sweet fruit of shalom (NRSV: “prosperity”).



Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

These are big and wondrous dreams for a world broken and hurting. Nevertheless, we are mindful that our wondrous God also comes to us in small and humble glimpses of grace: in forgiveness extended and received, in new beginnings and the end of old patterns, in moments of Sabbath during our over-busy lives, in love unexpected. In hope of these wondrous things, we join our voices with this royal hymn as we cry out to God, “Thy kingdom come!”

Dr. Ryan P. Bonfiglio
Scholar in Residence, First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta
Lecturer in Old Testament



MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2016

We are now in the heart of the season—too far along to still feel as if Advent has snuck up on us “like a thief in the night.” We all have different connotations of this time of year, but I suspect few of us have an apocalyptic focus—centering ourselves on the second coming of Christ. I have worked with youth who have questioned, “Why do we have to tell the same Christmas story year after year?” Yes! Why do we? The themes of Advent reach not only into the past but root themselves in the present and stretch into the future. This text from I Thessalonians is a glimpse into the mysterious, even ominous, yet hopeful future that God has promised.

Paul reminds the recipients of this letter to watch diligently for the Lord to come again. This reminder includes us! Our Advent attention should not be on chasing Santa or offering a rote repetition of the story of baby Jesus. As “children of light,” we should

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

be watchful and eager, discerning the times and how we are called to respond to them. We should be donning “the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

This Advent season, it is our joy together to express our faith, hope and love in community. Let us “encourage one another and build up each other.” Let us anticipate, alongside Mary, the pending arrival of Emmanuel. Let us live as the early Christians did, eagerly expecting the return of our beloved Lord and Savior.

Cheryl Carson
DEdMin 2018



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016

How does this text speak to you on this particular day? We are entrenched in the busyness of the holiday season and immersed in our daily lives. Will Paul's voice break in? Can you hear Paul speaking of what Christ has accomplished?

The reason for Paul's boldness in writing rings as true today as it did to the early Christians. Maybe it is just the message we need to hear on this day. Perhaps we are frazzled or worried or tired. Paul reminds us that the strength behind his own convictions is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and joy of the world. From Him comes our strength. From Him comes our peace.

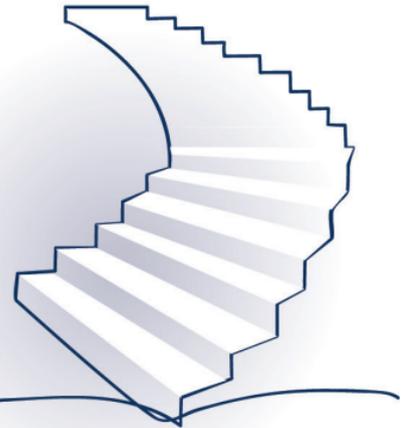
On this busy day, embedded in a busy week, will we look for our strength in Christ? Paul writes that he boasts of his good work and he desires to share the good news of

Romans 15:14-21

Christ with those who do not know Him. What good news can we share today? What will empower us to boldly share with the world the true reason for this season?

We have, let us not forget, received the same grace God bestowed on Paul. The confidence and boldness of Paul in the letter to the Romans is our confidence and boldness as well. We join, with Paul, in boldly proclaiming the good news in word and action so that “those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.” To God be the glory.

J. David Randolph
MDiv 2017



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

Waiting for God to fulfill a promise or answer a repeated prayer with the confidence that God is at work in our lives marks one of the most difficult challenges of our earthly pilgrimage. In a culture that esteems choice and instant gratification, waiting evokes feelings of fear and weakness. Waiting spotlights our vulnerabilities as humans, but this is often exactly the time when we hear the Divine promise, “Do not be afraid.”

Although my wife and I were warned our pregnancy was at risk and were advised to give up hope, we refused to turn our backs on the child we had already come to love and named David, our “beloved.” For months we waited as we cried out to God, “O Lord, what will you give us?” During this season of waiting, we struggled to find enough courage to trust our future to the God of Israel who said to Abraham, “Look toward the heavens and count the stars...”

Genesis 15:1-18

Our future is unforeseeable, but God promises to walk beside us just as God did for a sojourner named Abraham and a village-girl named Mary. Advent assures us that our Creator has come to this world in Jesus Christ to walk with us through the uncertainties of life, and God will come again to make the wrongs of this world right. “Do not be afraid.”

Rev. Adrian Neil Doll

DMin, Christian Spirituality

Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Norwalk, Ohio



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2016

“Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.” Psalm 146 is a hymn of praise, extolling God’s mighty, saving, and healing works, extolling the God who forever keeps faith with God’s people.

The images of God in these verses fascinate me. Here, a person of power and authority looks toward those who are beneath the notice of worldly power: God feeds, sets free, gives sight, loves, watches over, lifts up, and upholds. What a message of hope and a call to action! In a world filled with tearing down, we must lift up. We must hold out our hands in God’s name to lift up those who have been beaten down, trodden upon, and forgotten. We must lift up the faces of those whose heads are bowed in grief, shame, or fear. In a world filled with tearing down, God has lifted us up, that we might, in turn, lift up our neighbors.

Psalm 146: 5-10

As we await the coming of the Messiah in the hope of the Advent Season, we remember that God, who has been at work in the world since the beginning of time, is already at work among us. Let us heed God's call for us to be at work among God's people, lifting up those who are oppressed by poverty, injustice, loneliness, or despair, lifting them up to hope in the Lord our God.

Betsy Stow
MDiv 2018



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2016

If you are feeling the stress of holiday obligations and the pressure to get everything “perfect” this season, I encourage you to read the words of the psalmist again. None of the words are about gifts, parties, and the ever-elusive “perfect” holiday. The poetic verse does not have much association with our holiday culture. Yet, this psalm does encourage us to praise God—a God who does unexpected things! Our Lord sets prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, watches over strangers and so much more!

It appears at first that a common component of this psalm and our contemporary culture is joy. But our culture often holds us captive to its shifting demands and false promises. Can our culture really deliver us joy? Rather, the note of praise of this psalm is the joy of seeing the stranger and caring for them. It is the joy of receiving and relishing

Psalm 147:1-11

the gifts of God. This is the joy, in this season of Advent, that directs our hearts and hands toward the Savior who will turn your world upside down and bring you freedom and peace you have never known before.

This is the season to sing praises to our gracious God who “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Let us take notice of the oppressed, work towards justice and uplift those who are marginalized. As people of God, we are called in this season, and in this psalm, to risk being the people we are called to be and exude the joy of Christ to all we encounter.

Michelle Mehan
MAPT 2018



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016

Waiting with great expectation is a special kind of waiting. The more we wait, the more intense our expectation grows. As we read this thanksgiving poem attributed to Hannah, we can recall how faithfully Hannah had waited for a child. She had not waited only months for her baby; she had waited years! In Hannah's culture, her barrenness would cause extra difficulty; it would harm her social status and her relationship with her family. As Hannah waited for God to provide for her, she easily could have grown bitter and angry with God. Yet, here in this song, she has forgotten her agonizing time of waiting. She rejoices in her victory—the birth of a beautiful child. Over and over again, she praises God. Hannah acknowledges how much she has been hurt by her enemies, but she also acknowledges that the Lord is her strength.



1 Samuel 2:1-8

We often find it hard to wait for God. Sometimes we feel God cannot or will not answer. Sometimes God does not bless us in the way that we hope. We struggle. But Hannah's story reminds us that when we are in need, when we are waiting, our best hope is not to turn from God but to look to God. May we each be blessed with the humility of Hannah, and may God help us recognize God's grace in everything.

Rev. Jason Clapper

DMin, Gospel and Culture

Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Montrose, PA



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

Luke 1 recounts the meeting of two women to whom God has paid special attention. They are family, and they have received remarkable, difficult news about the children they will bear. When Mary, the younger, was visited by an angel, she accepted her mission from God with a brief question and a few humble words. Yet in this passage, with the blessing of Elizabeth, her elder, Mary boldly proclaims God's favor to her and bears witness to the material weight of God's mercy.

Her speech becomes one of the most celebrated in all of Christian liturgy. Known as the Magnificat, Mary's words are recited daily in many churches around the world. When Mary sang her song of liberation, she joined her voice with her foremother Hannah in 1 Samuel 2. When we lift our voices to God through this ancient hymn, we join Christian ancestors throughout all generations who have anticipated the long arc of God's mercy. Can you hear them singing?

But listen—you will hear that the mercy of which they sing is no easy blessing! Mary's vision requires reversals that would shake our world to its core. Drawing attention

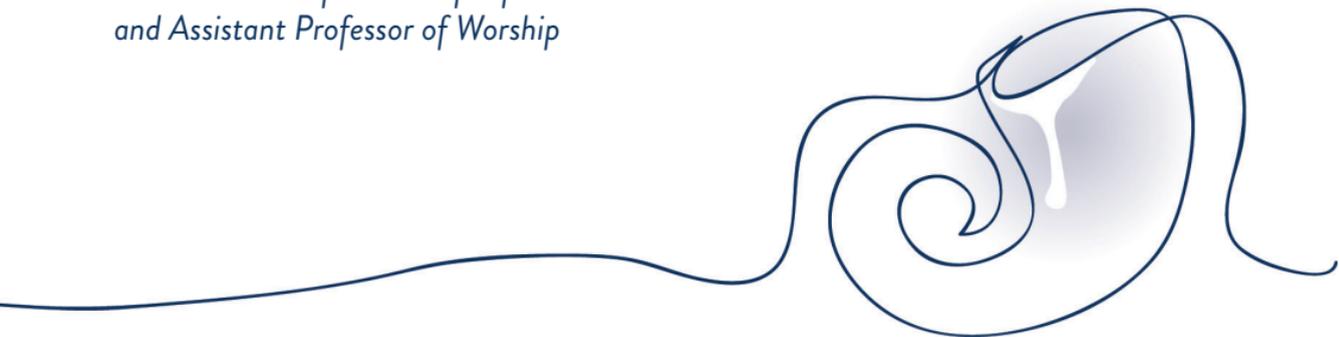


Luke 1:46-55

to her own lowliness, Mary points to a persistent pattern in God's mercy: The hungry are fed; the poor are lifted up. The rich experience emptiness; the powerful lose status.

Mary's radical song requires courage of us who would welcome a world turned upside down. How can we, like Mary, bear witness to this strange mercy of God? In the hope of Mary and Elizabeth, may we be blessed with boldness to work for a world where the oppressed sing songs of liberation and where each of us has a part to play in God's plan to favor those who are poor.

Dr. Rebecca F. Spurrier
Associate Dean for Worship Life
and Assistant Professor of Worship



MONDAY, DECEMBER 12

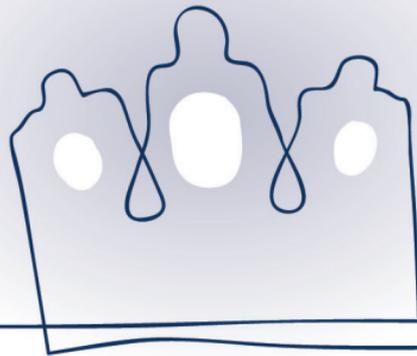
Many biblical scholars ascribe this psalm to David. The intimate relationship indicated in this psalm is one we recognize between David and God. “As a deer longs for flowing streams,” says the psalmist, “so my soul longs for you.” Clearly, David is not ashamed or prideful or concerned about what others will think about his deep longing for God. He acknowledges this blessed space and glories in his relationship with the God he adores. He calls God his “rock” and pours out his soul in both joy and sorrow before the face of God.

Because of David’s intimate connection with God, he is able to hope in God even when he feels forsaken. Just as God heard and cared for David, we, too are not forgotten.

Psalm 42

This psalm calls us to a relationship of honesty and openness with God, sharing both our joys and our sorrows. Perhaps the key to having the closeness and intimacy David shared with God—one of knowing and trusting—begins with your own deep longing. Do not seal your lips; proclaim God's righteousness in the great assembly! Abandon your pride and fear and willingly and openly praise the One who seeks relationship with you! As we worship and pray during this Advent season, remember that God sent God's only Son, Jesus Christ as a sign of love and peace. As we sing Joy to the world, the Lord is come this season, recall God's comforting song in the night. What song can you sing that intimately connects you to God?

Jann Murray
MAPT 2018



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016

This passage from Jude brings to mind one of William Yeats' poems, *The Second Coming*, a response to the first World War. The first stanza commands attention:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats' lines seem absent of hope. The imagery is dark. It was, after all, a post-war landscape in which he wrote. We may read his words and think our present-day situation is not all that much better. Can we hear the voice of God, our "falconer?" Do we feel even our own convictions waning as we face a multitude of social ills that plague society today?



Jude 17-25

Are we losing battles to “the worst” who push their agenda more forcefully than we do?

While the subject matter of Yeats’ poetic verse is akin to that of Jude’s letter, Jude’s words are not hopeless: The Holy Spirit is present. Clothed with the Spirit, we can stand in our convictions and be merciful to others. During this hopeful season of Advent, let us relocate and plant Christ as our center—a center that can and surely will hold and sustain us.

Stephanie Loftin
MDiv 2017



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2016

Zechariah is one of the Bible's best kept secrets. This prophetic book contains passages that will cause you to weep . . . for joy! Zechariah 8 is such a passage. The prophet's words shimmer with God's vision for new life in the city of Jerusalem.

Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets (8:4-5).

The prophet recounts how harsh life has been in a city ravaged by poverty and terror. But God resolves to turn things around with a “sowing of peace” that will usher in a new age of security and prosperity for all women and men, boys and girls.



Zechariah 8:1-17

Jump from 520 B.C.E. to 2016 C.E., a year of terror in streets around the world. The carnage in Nice, France on Bastille Day, the bombing of West 23rd street in Manhattan in September. Crime, police brutality, and riots, moreover, have made city streets places of fear and danger for many. But God intends for the streets of the city to be places of peace and play for all! Zechariah's message: "Do not be afraid; let your hands be strong." And hear the angel's message, "Do not be afraid, for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Take that to the streets.

Dr. William P. Brown

William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2016

This is a psalm that begins at night, in shadows. Or at least it seems that way. Listen to what the psalmist cries:

“Hear us, Shepherd of Israel!”

“Awaken your might!”

“Restore us!”

“Make your face shine on us!”

Every one of those verbs is a call for God to wake up and bring light. It's as if the people are sitting in deep darkness, alone and afraid. The silence is deafening. The night is suffocating. It drags on and on, and no one can see an end to it. Will morning ever break? And if it does, what will the light show us?

Advent is a season of waiting, and not just for the warmth and comfort and joy of the holidays. We are waiting for restoration, for the power of God to save us with truth

Psalm 80:1-17

and light. Some of those truths may be hard to see. This is certainly a year in which our nation and our world have had to look at some hard truths and painful realities.

But we do not wait alone. There is One who does hear and will awaken. There is even One who is coming to restore our hope and lead us into new life together.

What shadowy places do you see, where you live? Where can you be a bearer of the light of Christ?

“Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.”

Dr. Anna Carter Florence
Peter Marshall Professor of Preaching



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2016

We are mid-way through Advent, the season of preparation. Perhaps you are ready—gifts are bought and wrapped. Beloved ornaments hang on the tree. Plans are made and confirmed with friends.

Yet this season asks us to make ourselves ready for something more—to prepare for the coming of Christ. Can we ever be ‘ready enough’ for such a mystery, such a power?

Galatians 4:3-5 contains the theological center of Paul’s entire letter. The cozy family language makes it is easy to miss the passage’s disruptive, startling message. It announces God’s “redemptive invasion” of a world defined by sin and brokenness. It reminds us that God sent the Son also to invade our human hearts! The gentleness of Silent Night is interrupted by the power of God who “sent the Son” to invade, unsettle, and redeem a world marked by alienation, injustice, and death.

Galatians 4:1-7

Despite all God did to prepare us, we were not ready. In Bethlehem, there was no room in the inn. Herod, king of the Jews, was not ready. The religious leaders were not ready. Even now, we are not ready—to love our enemies, forgive seventy times seven, welcome the stranger, live as one family in faith.

The good news is that God does not wait for us to be ready. Instead, God determined “the fullness of time,” unilaterally invading the world and our own hearts with an army of One, whose only battle cry is love, whose only weapon is the power of mercy and grace. With the Spirit, we cry out in gratitude, “Abba! Father!” Ready or not, God claims us fully as children and heirs.

Dr. Kim Clayton
Director of Contextual Education



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016

The apostle John informs us that from the beginning of time, God shared a deep and abiding interest in creation and in each of us. God's commitment was visibly and tangibly displayed in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, through our incarnate Lord, God demonstrates God's eternal embrace of all people—an embrace that is sure and secure.

Yet in a world that seems deeply committed to the evils and idols of bigotry, oppression, racism, and sexism, many among us do not feel embraced, but rather abandoned by God. Collectively, we feel the tepidness of indifference and the coldness of despair. We long for the daybreak of relief and compassion.

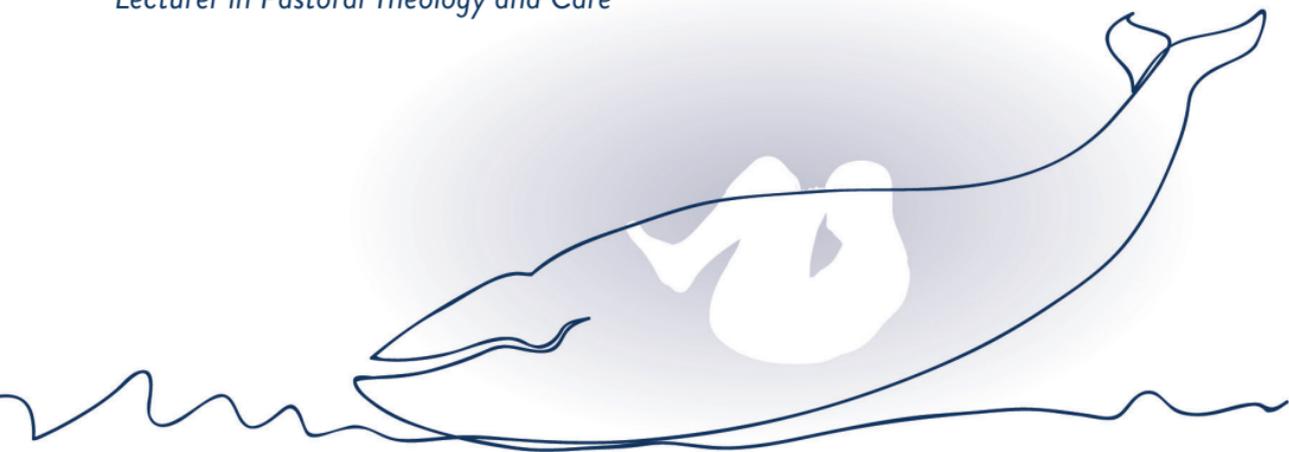
In these moments of confusion and suffering, we must remember that “the one who comes from heaven is above all.” Our hope and strength are built on nothing less. Jesus came to earth to share our human condition of despair and brokenness. Jesus was crucified as a sacrifice for us. Jesus was raised from the dead in a decisive defeat of evil and violence, a defeat that will someday be made complete.



John 3:31-36

The grace and mercy of God cannot be earned but is freely given to each of us. It is assured. It is unconditional. It is eternal. This truth stands no matter the lengths that the powers and principalities of this world will go to say otherwise. In this season of anticipation and hopefulness, remember that you are eternally embraced by the God of love.

Dr. Michael Lee Cook
Lecturer in Pastoral Theology and Care



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

King Ahaz of Jerusalem paces glumly on the highway next to the reservoir, staring despondently at the ever-sinking water level. Meanwhile, two giant armies stand outside the gate, hoping to bash it down and kill everyone inside. It looks like the end is nigh. Just then, YHWH tells Isaiah and his son Someofyallwillmakeitoutalive to give a message to Ahaz: “Don’t be afraid. Trust me instead.” Isaiah also gives Ahaz a sign saying: “See that pregnant young woman over there? She’ll have a son, and his name will be Godisrighttherewithus. Don’t be afraid. Trust God instead.” It’s a strange sign, because it’ll take years for anyone to see that it came true. But to everybody’s everlasting surprise but Isaiah, Jerusalem miraculously survives the siege.

Many years later, another despondent man looks glumly at the ground. After realizing that his fiancée is newly pregnant with someone else’s child, he’s made up his mind to leave her. Like everyone else in Palestine, they’re desperately trying to keep their heads above water under the oppressive weight of the Roman Empire. It seems like the end is nigh. Just then, a pesky messenger of YHWH visits Joseph and tells him some shocking news: “Don’t be afraid. See that pregnant young woman over there? Mary will

Isaiah 7:10-16 and Matthew 1:18-25

have a son, and his name will be Salvation, because that's what he'll do. Just like Isaiah said about Godisrighttherewithus.”

Things today seem to be going downhill, too. A glance at the news often makes me wonder if the end is nigh. Sometimes I catch myself feeling like I'm watching the reservoir of hope dry up. But just at those moments, I should expect the voice of a pesky messenger with a word that is both ancient and ever new: Don't be afraid. Trust God instead. Await the coming Salvation – the one who is God right here with us.

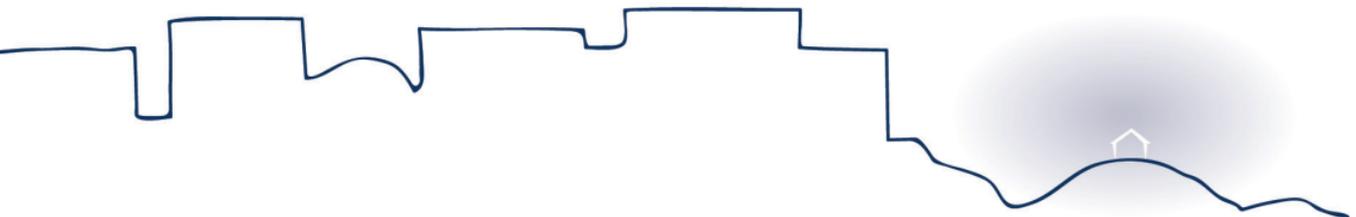
Dr. Brennan Breed
Assistant Professor of Old Testament



Galatians 4:8-20

sin. Without the law we do not know what sin is. The law reveals that we are unable to keep the law and points to the Savior who can make us whole—Jesus the Christ. The law reveals human sin and brokenness but does not itself have the power to heal or save. Depending on the law for salvation is like taking CT scans over and over again hoping that the scanning process itself will heal. This, of course, is foolishness. Do we depend on versions of the law for wholeness? How can we come to Christ who alone is our healer and Savior?

Dr. Kevin Park
Associate Dean for Advanced Professional Studies
and Assistant Professor of Theology



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2016

Mary's Magnificat, a familiar 'song' in the season of Advent, is a direct echo of the many passions, emotions, and longings of Hannah centuries earlier. Take some time to read these songs side by side and hear the echo of both longing and triumph in these women's voices.

Although Hannah believed she could not bear a child, God surprised her by giving her a child who she then pledged to God's service. This story is not just about Hannah and her priestly son. Hannah sings not only of the reversal in her own story, but she sings of a reversal in her people's fortunes. Her child, Samuel, lived in contrast to the corrupted leadership found in Eli's sons. This set a trajectory that changed the political history of Israel. Hannah held out hope in God's power to overturn unjust systems and bring about transformation.

The new leadership found in Samuel did not come without great turmoil. God worked in and through the messy politics of the time to achieve God's purposes. Similarly, Jesus did not come without great turmoil and yet God worked through the

1 Samuel 2:1-10

brokenness of his time to fulfill God's purposes. Where do you see this kind of up-ending? How might such a song sung today challenge, inspire, or indict us? As the celebration of the Christmas season draws near, may we allow Hannah's words to stir a song in us—a song that gives us heart and vision to know with full confidence that God is still at work around us. Will we pay attention?

Matt Rich
Admissions Counselor



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

The genealogy of Jesus described in Mathew is not merely a long list of names. It reveals extraordinary things that the scribe thought it was exceedingly important for us to understand about Jesus.

This list of names reveals that Jesus' human identity as God's chosen one extended all the way back to the Lord's first revelation to Abraham. Jesus' relation to Abraham reminds us that God's revelation on earth began long before the birth of the baby in the manger, but was announced with the Lord's first promise to Abraham.

This genealogy also reminds us that Jesus' life is a dramatic break from the traditional norms of conception, birth, and lineage. It is the ultimate inbreaking of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the heir of Abraham and Joseph, the son of Mary and the manifestation of God incarnate: he is all these things in one! He represents a new thing.

Matthew 1: 1-17

This story retold in names reveals that the lineage begins with the Lord's first chosen Adam, who was promised overflowing blessings and abundance, and ends with the last Adam, the one who was sent to give this abundance through new life in a refreshing and disruptive word.

This Advent season let us re-read the lineage of Jesus with fresh eyes so that we too are encouraged to do a new thing! Let us recall the disruptive inbreaking of the Spirit and dare to call ourselves Christians. Let us remember that all things are made new in the uncommon image of Christ.

Ayanna Grady-Hunt
MAPT 2017



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2016

We live in a world plagued with adversity. The manifestations of humankind's insecurities are demonstrated before our eyes daily. Some bend the law for their benefit, and abuse their authority with their actions and arrogance. Others use terrorism to prove their point. Yet in the midst of this turmoil we are told to trust that all things are in the protective hands of the Lord: our Mighty one, our Judge, our Lawgiver, and our King.

Isaiah reminds us that one of the ways in which God shows loving kindness to all is in providing safe-havens of refreshment and peace. It may be difficult to access this peace when it seems as if our world is asunder, but as Children of God, we can trust that our Lord's hands cover and protect us. God, the great judge, sets order. It is into a broken and adverse world that God sends God's only son to vindicate us. If we stop to

Isaiah 33:17-22

ponder the magnitude of this mighty work of protection, we cannot help but overflow with joy and peace.

Our glorious King is the one who fulfilled the law and stood before all of Jerusalem to be judged for us. Jesus is the one who died and rose again with all power and might. Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the mighty Judge who reigns forever: this is the one who came to be with us, the one who is constantly present and protecting us. In the knowledge of this great reassurance let us give thanks and proclaim: All Hail King Jesus! All Hail Emmanuel!

Richelle Smith
MDiv 2019



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016

It is lovingly referred to as Mary's song of praise: the Magnificat. It is voiced from the lips of a woman who will become the "God Bearer," who will give birth to an incarnation of hope in a fallen world. Rather than reading it simply as a scripture passage embedded in Luke's story of the Nativity, speak or sing it aloud. Allow the syllables to roll off your tongue, and take their measure as they fall upon your ear. These audible words carry weight, wonder, and promise.

Radio astronomers are able to render into sound signals made by distant stars and planets. In 1965 the oldest sound that can ever be heard was recorded, the crackle and pop of cosmic radiation from the birth of our universe 14.7 billion years ago. Astronomers are now discovering that the visual data gathered from telescopes can be transposed into sound frequencies that can be heard. Our universe may now be encountered and explored through hearing as much as by sight. The cosmos, long assumed to be silent, become a symphony of rhythms and beats, pitches and harmonies. Light frequencies ripple as tones. Spiral, glowing galaxies give voice to a range of unfolding melodies and complex tempos. Buried within the data sounds a deep signature "chord" that resonates and rolls in the silence. The universe sings.

Luke 1:46b - 55

There is a contemporary Orthodox icon that represents Mary as birthing an event not simply for all of humanity, but for all of creation. The icon is known as “Mary of the Cosmos” and portrays her figure as surrounded by the fiery light of the “Big Bang.” Mary’s song becomes the canticle of a cosmos, chaos redeemed into ordered and fulfilled creation.

Speak or sing Mary’s words in accord with the universe. It is Advent. The music is about to begin.

Dr. Skip Johnson
Senior Lecturer in Pastoral Theology and Care



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

“Do not be afraid.” That’s a tall order. Our individual and common lives are saturated with reasons for raised heartrates and diminished sleep, whether it’s politics, money, family tensions, droughts, floods, acts of violence, or even what’s happening in our own minds and bodies. The world is chronically fearful.

While we are swamped by these realities, the angel soothes and challenges us, “Do not be afraid.” How is that possible? What or who has the power to release us from fear’s fierce chokehold? In the face of a sudden supernatural chorus, or the grittier, earthier anxieties inherent in life in the first century (or the 21st century, for that matter), a newborn in a barn does not seem to offer much comfort. Yet according to the angel’s announcement, this remarkable child is the one whose joyful entry into the world invites us not to be afraid. The glad tidings are that Heaven has broken into Earth in the form of this little savior destined to endure our fear with us and to uproot its power. Emmanuel, God-with-us, liberates and empowers us to discard the paralyzing shell of

Luke 2:1-14

self-preservation fashioned by fear and to step into abundant, courageous life, free to seek boldly the coming reign of God's justice and peace on Earth.

As we celebrate the coming of this improbable infant, and as we await His return, may we not only receive the warmth and light of the season, but also answer the angel's electrifying summons – and Jesus' call – to live with courageous hope!

Emily Peterson

Program Coordinator for Advanced Professional Studies



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2016

When we receive a card, text, or video announcing the birth of a child, the family is inviting us to celebrate with them. When the angel announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, their first response is fear – not celebration. Why fear? As scholars remind us, the shepherds living out in the fields protecting their flock are exposed to deprivation and danger. The presence of an angel with good news – a birth announcement – is not the kind of intruder that they expect to encounter in the darkness of night and the starkness



Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

of their lives. Likewise, these were unsettling political times; the mandated census meant that everyone would soon be subjected to greater taxation, exploitation, and poverty. No one is expecting the angel's message: "I am bringing you good news of great joy to all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Jesus—Savior, Messiah, Lord—is born homeless into the politics and economics of uncertainty that characterize the lives of everyday people like the shepherds then and now. Luke's threefold designation of Jesus along with the conditions of his birth and the story of the shepherds' response turn this birth announcement into an ethical imperative: Go find Jesus lying in a manger and witness to all the people. Jesus heals, liberates, and sees us in the starkness of our lives. Do not be afraid.

Dr. Marcia Y. Riggs
J. Erskine Love Professor of Christian Ethics



COLUMBIA
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BY GIVING TO THE COLUMBIA ANNUAL FUND,
you touch every aspect of seminary life - academics, student aid,
technologies, facilities. Your gift conveys a spirit of confidence and
appreciation for an extraordinary seminary.

WAYS TO GIVE

Send a gift by mail.

This response card is included for your convenience.

By phone.

Please call Diane Thorne, 404-687-4590

Online.

You can make a donation through our secure website at

www.CTSnet.edu.

Click on **Giving**



COLUMBIA
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

