



12 Days of Christmas Devotions

★ December 25th ★

“How the Light Comes”
by Jan Richardson

I cannot tell you how the light comes.
What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining.
That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us.

That it loves searching out what is hidden,
what is lost, what is forgotten or in peril or in pain.

That it has a fondness for the body,
for finding its way toward flesh,
for tracing the edges of form,
for shining forth through the eye,
the hand, the heart.

I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does.
That it will.

That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you,
though it may seem long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape you did not foresee.

And so may we this day turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes.

May we open
and open more
and open still
to the blessed light
that comes.

Poem from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*
by Jan Richardson



December 26th



I often wonder about what happened in the gaps, in all of those moments when scripture is silent. We know Mary had a long journey. Nine months of carrying a child amidst whispers and probably worse. A long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem when traveling was the last thing on her mind. A long night's labor that would have left her weary and filled with joy. A long moment when perhaps time stood still, as shepherds arrived bringing news of angel songs and prophesy.

The next thing we hear, it is eight days later and the Holy Family is in Jerusalem to present Jesus in the temple. What happened in between? Scripture doesn't say, but I think we can be sure that Mary rested. Yes, there were feedings and diaper changes and more traveling. But somewhere in there, Mary rested. It had been a long journey, and Mary needed rest.

Friends, it is been a long journey for us too. We have been laboring hard in love to prepare our Advent and Christmas celebrations. Soon, we will be back to work, looking towards what comes next. But in between, we, like Mary, need to rest.

Reflection by Rev. Jana Yeaton



December 26th



Night Prayer
from A New Zealand Prayer Book:

Lord, it is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys, new possibilities.

In your name we pray.
Amen.



December 27th

“Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem”
by Maya Angelou

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.



December 27th

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.

The word is Peace.

It is loud now. It is louder.

Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.

It is what we have hungered for.

Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.

A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.

Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.

We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.

We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.

Peace.

Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.

We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,

Implore you, to stay a while with us.

So we may learn by your shimmering light

How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.



December 27th

On this platform of peace, we can create a language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.

We jubilate the precious advent of trust.

We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,

Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves

And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.



December 28th



Peace in the Midst of Tribulation

Isaiah 2:4-5

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

During this Advent season, as we take this journey toward Bethlehem, we do so with a sense of anticipation, celebrating the birth of Christ, our hope and our salvation, the coming Messiah – the ‘Prince of Peace’.

But it is riveting to see, as we celebrate the season, regardless of our faith or spiritual beliefs, the world news keeps repeating the same stories – despair, tragedy, and warfare, pain and human suffering. There is the injustice of hunger and poverty... the senselessness of brutal murders and violence. People looking in the sciences and to space exploration to find satisfaction, and in education and personal achievements. One of the words we associate most with Advent and Christmas is peace. “Peace on earth.” We sing joyously in Christmas carols of Jesus being “the Prince of Peace.” However, the mood in our country and around the world is far from peaceful.

This year, many of us will approach Advent with a sense of loss much due to the severity of this world’s pandemic. Persons are engulfed and preoccupied with worries, grief and pain that seems to peak during what should be a time of joy and celebration. Our souls long and hunger for an inner peace that cannot be achieved through human efforts, but can only come from God, as we seek his guidance.

The words coming from the Prophet Isaiah, describes the time when God’s promise of salvation will be a reality, not just for the house of Jacob, but for all nations, for all people. This dream of peace and an end to conflict will cease. The Prophet Isaiah invites us to anticipate a time when all peoples and nations will turn toward God and live-in peace, as we “walk toward the Light of the Lord”. May you find peace in his promises.

Thought: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” (Saint Francis)

Reflection by Rev. Dr. Moreen P. Hughes



December 29th

Luke 2:15-19

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

“To Make Our Love Braver”

by Scott L. Barton

She did something different,
She treasured and pondered;
Not only amazed, but
She thought, and she wondered
Just what was their meaning—
That this diapered wee boy,
Would be to all people
The sign of a great joy?

And why even now does
He cause such a flutter
In hearts all around, while
These carols we utter?
Is this what they meant when
They said that a savior
Would come—a Messiah,
To make our love braver?



December 30th



Matthew 2:1-2

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

At least once each December, I wonder what it would be like if we celebrated Christmas in the traditional New England manner. As I string hundreds of lights and shop for presents, at times wondering how much they will be appreciated, I long for the days when (at least in Massachusetts Bay) everyone (as Ebenezer Scrooge phrased it in Dickens' A Christmas Carol) "who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart." Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't need "ribbons, tags, packages, boxes, or bags!" Actually, we don't. God sent us Jesus, His Son, not expecting stuff in return.

The Magi, after an exceptionally long journey, presented Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Three gifts which are rich in earthly and symbolic manners. Christina Rossetti, in the Christmas Hymn "In the Bleak Midwinter", reminds us what is actually expected from us to celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus:

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am? —
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part, —
Yet what I can I give Him, —
Give my heart.

Reflection by Rev. John Odams



December 31st

I love to begin my reading during Advent with the Magnificat; Mary's immediate response to the Angel Gabriel is not one of denial or disbelief; her response is unabashed youthful giddiness, reflected in this wonderful prayer of Thanksgiving and Praise to God, the Magnificat.

But after a moment of what was probably an enormous aching silence as she collected her thoughts, her immediate response is not about herself. There is no concern for her wellbeing, no concern for the impact this news would have on her family, her friends, her town – and her fiancé, Joseph. Her response was all about God. She uses the phrase “He has” eight times as she recounts what God had done.

And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but [he] has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but [he] has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel.

He has --- as Mary exclaims,, been responsible for everything in her world. We need to remember that this is a young girl who has just received incredible news. It is a joyous passage, not a sober one. Her faith is being confirmed by the visit from Gabriel. She is excited. She glorifies the Lord and rejoices! This young virgin girl has been given an incredible message from God.

We shy away from the word virgin, unsure how its meaning in this story. We get stuck when we put our cultural spin on the word, but I want us to think wider, more broadly.

Mary is able to find that place at the center of her being where she and God connect; continually, intimately, personally. She is a young girl of faith and is very connected to God.



December 31st

Theologian Thomas Merton calls this place within all of us a “point vierge,” “a point within us untouched, by illusion, a point of truth. . . which belongs entirely to God, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This small space within us is the pure glory of God in us.” Regardless of our gender there is this virgin place within us. It’s a place that we can only find when we stop idolizing the illusion that we have control over events of our lives and recognize our own spiritual poverty. Humility is a word that comes to mind. Only when we humble ourselves before God are we able to connect with this internal virgin place that Merton talks about.

Kathleen Norris, a writer on Christian Spirituality writes that Mary’s “yes” to her pending motherhood, to the immense and wondrous possibilities, demonstrates that there is something in each of us that no other person can touch; that belongs only to us, and to God; a virgin part of our being.

There is virgin territory in all of us, places that God wants to fill. Places in our soul where we come to God in a virgin state open to the possibilities.

Mary’s responds to God’s love by accepting what has been given her. She in essence says, “Here I am.” There is no arrogance, however, but only holy fear and wonder. Mary proceeds making her commitment without knowing what it will entail or where it will lead.

We all have these those places in our lives, where God speaks through the events surrounding us and we connect at the point verige. Do I run from it or am I virgin enough to respond from my deepest, truest self, and say something new, a “yes” that will change me forever?

Reflection by Rev. Diane Badger



January 1st



“A New Year Prayer”

by Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit,
former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

God of life, God of grace, God of love!
Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!
We come to you in thanksgiving, and in prayer,
God our Creator, for this past year that you gave us to live together –
as your creation and with your all creation,
as your beloved human beings, as one human family –
we thank you for all who have seen and received true signs of your love,
through the splendour of your creation and through the generosity of other human beings,
but also, through signs of justice and peace
becoming true signs of the presence of your Kingdom among us.

At this time we come to you with our prayers
for all those who have experienced that their lives
have been filled with sorrows, fear, violence and death,
for all those who have lost their expectations for the better day of tomorrow,
for the happy new year that comes.

God in your mercy,
You hear our prayers for those who thirst and long for justice and peace:
give them all your grace, your signs of love,
give them your righteousness, your joy!
Kyrie Eleison!

Give us, O Jesus Christ,
the courage to convey the embrace and presence you have offered to all
through your suffering, death and resurrection.
Let us end this year in Your Holy name, O Jesus Christ,
the name you were given because you were sent to save us from our sins,
Christe Eleison!

Let us begin the new year in Your Holy name, O Jesus Christ.
You are there in what comes to give us your love.
You are there and ask us to love you and all those you care for.
Give us, O Holy Spirit, that each one of us,
and the one, Holy Church, and the one and whole world
can be united in hope, moved by Christ's love.

Amen



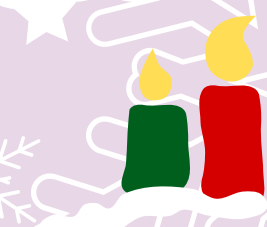
January 2nd



“Psalm 23”
by Michael Harvey

My shepherd is I Will Be There,
who leads me to high, level ground,
where there are springs of life-giving water
to restore me to wholeness.
Then God leads me to the paths of justice and mercy,
speaking the promise, I Will Be There.
When I travel through the dark and dangerous wilderness,
nothing will frighten me,
for you have promised to be with me.
Signs of your protection are all around me.
You seat me at a round table with my enemies;
You welcome me with oil and wine.
I think back and understand
that justice and mercy have pursued me
all along my journey
and have patiently led me to your eternal house.

From *Attempts at Light* by Michael Harvey



January 3rd



Mark 9:23-24

Jesus said to him, “If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes.”
Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

2021 was a long year. A year in which, once again, our certainties were tested and solid ground could feel elusive. In the world around us, we are often not sure where to place our faith, our hope, and our certainty. But this is nothing new. Faith and doubt, trust and skepticism, often coexist in our hearts and in our lives. Sometimes faith means staring doubt in the face and believing anyway, trusting Jesus to meet us where we are and fill in the gaps between where we are and where we intend to be.

“An Affirmation of Faith”

from *Common Prayer Pocket Edition*

by Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Lord, you have always given bread for the coming day;
and though I am poor, today I believe.

Lord, you have always given strength for the coming day;
and though I am weak, today I believe.

Lord, you have always given peace for the coming day;
and though of anxious heart, today I believe.

Lord, you have always kept me safe in trials;
and now, tried as I am, today I believe.

Lord, you have always marked the road for the coming day;
and though it may be hidden, today I believe.

Lord, you have always lightened this darkness of mine;
and though the night is here, today I believe.

Lord, you have always spoken when time was ripe;
and though you be silent, today I believe.



January 3rd



Matthew 2:13-14

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt,

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always,
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

By Thomas Merton, from *Thoughts in Solitude*



January 3rd



“The Work of Christmas”

by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.