



# For and With Los Angeles: Building Communities of Justice and Hope

## Advent Reflections



Loyola High School

OF LOS ANGELES



## ADVENT PRAYER BOOK 2019

During the liturgical season of Advent, the Christian church often sings a hymn entitled O come, O come, Emmanuel. “Emmanuel,” a Hebrew word meaning “God with us” expresses the mystery of the Incarnation, that God “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). The song’s simple melody can be the type that continues to play in one’s mind throughout the day – an invitation to stay attuned to “God with us.”

This year Loyola colleagues have been joined by members of our Ignatian family throughout the greater Los Angeles region of the Jesuits West Province to share reflections that bring this mystery into our midst by way of the written word. Each writer contemplates “God with us” in and through very real circumstances of life. Routines and rituals, surprises and delights, struggles, worries, and challenges are the context for this wonderment.

As you savor their ruminations, we hope you will also wonder at the invitation. How do you experience “God with you” and “in all things?” How are you “for and with” one another in light of this bidding? What is the invitation in your life circumstance to help build communities of hope and reconciliation?

May this Advent season be a time of quiet waiting and invitation to embrace the mystery of God with us.

- Ann Holmquist  
Vice President for Mission  
Loyola High School



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## DECEMBER 1 | FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122: 1-9; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

“They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left.” - Matthew 24: 39-40

For he will come swiftly like a thief in the night, we are also told in this reading from Matthew! For almost 2000 years Christians have been eagerly awaiting Christ's return, hearing a continual call to awareness as a central virtue of our faith. However, like an excited lover expecting to be picked up for a big date we are still waiting! We have learned that an awareness of expectation instead is an eager patience, a patience that invites us to reimagine the type of world that we live in each and every day.

A patience that calls us to become aware of our larger world and its many issues, and ask, “What would Jesus do about this?” A patience to discover that we ourselves, as Christ's hands and feet in the world, are called to bring about the hope of the awareness that Christ's coming will radically change the reality of suffering. The patience to finally wake up and discover that the spirit of Advent calls us to embody our own expectations for Christ's second coming in all that we say and do as Christians in this world!

- Christian Astran  
Campus Ministry  
Loyola High School (LHS)

*Advent is a season of expectant waiting. How can I use this time to reimagine my place in our larger world?*





## DECEMBER 2 | MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 122:1-9; Matthew 8:5-11

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.” The centurion in today’s Gospel points out his unworthiness after Jesus offers to come to his home to cure his paralyzed servant.

How often do we feel unworthy when Jesus tries to enter into the room in our heart? It seems that shame finds each one of us at one time or another on this pilgrim journey of life. The poor, the incarcerated, the undocumented, the homeless, but also the wealthy, the worker, the student, the teacher, the parent. There are many times when our daily struggles prevent us from seeing ourselves as God sees us.

In today’s reading, Jesus sees the centurion fully and praises him for his hope and faith that Jesus could heal his servant – even from a distance. Advent invites us to kindle this light of hope as well.

We too might be feeling that we can only be loved by God from a distance, but God keeps waiting gently for a closer relationship. Advent invites us to imagine that we are worthy for Jesus to be born anew in the room in our heart and in the home of our soul.

- Ellie Hidalgo  
Pastoral Associate  
Dolores Mission

*Can I remember a time I felt unworthy this year?  
This Advent, can I invite Jesus to meet me in that vulnerable place?*

## DECEMBER 3 | MEMORIAL OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Luke 10:21-24

“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.” On the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, it is fitting we find ourselves reflecting on this Gospel. St. Francis Xavier was perhaps one of the most dynamic missionaries the Catholic Church has ever seen, traveling from various countries in Europe to Japan to India and everywhere in between in service of the Jesuits and the Catholic Church.

When I think about the countless immersion trips I have been blessed to accompany students on, I reflect on this reading. How blessed are our students to have the eyes to see what they see? Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the former Superior General of the Jesuits spoke about this idea at Santa Clara in 2000: “Solidarity is learned through contact rather than concepts. When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is a catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.”

When we return from immersion trips, how do we share what we have seen and heard and felt with those around us so that they too are blessed with eyes that see injustice? How are we transforming hearts and minds that feel compelled to respond in such a way that we are actively building a more justice-filled kingdom of God here on earth? What a challenge and incredible blessing to have eyes that see what we see when we engage in our broader community.

- Patrick Furlong  
Associate Director, Center for Service and Action  
Loyola Marymount University (LMU)

*What do I see when I engage in my community? How am I “blessed to see”?*







## DECEMBER 4 | WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23:1-6; Matthew 15:29-37

Whenever my parents came home from the hospital with a new “bundle of joy” my siblings and I would receive our little brother or sister with much fanfare! Not only were we eager to welcome a new family member, but we happily anticipated the tradition of receiving a gift from our new sibling. It was exciting for each one of us to be given our very own gift! As I enter the first week of Advent, I eagerly anticipate what God has in store for me as I prepare to receive the gift of Christ into this season of my life.

Just as God’s hand rests on the mountaintop in Isaiah 25:6-10, so is his presence felt on the mountains I’ve made out of mole hills and those he’s allowed me to climb in my life. If it weren’t for the mountains, I wouldn’t know to bring my concerns to Jesus. I wouldn’t know Jesus was a healer and provider if I never experienced being sick or hungry.

The season of Advent provides an opportunity to accept an invitation to encounter Jesus Christ. He’s inviting us to receive his priceless gifts that offer great consolation and provision. When we are willing to be led and are eager to follow Christ, we will lack nothing.

Are you ready to receive the gifts God has specifically earmarked for you?

- Lori Stanely  
Executive Director  
Loyola Institute for Spirituality

*Am I ready to receive the gifts God has for me?*

## DECEMBER 5 | THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a; Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Today's readings remind us that the foundation of our lives is God's love. As Isaiah says (verse 4): "Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal rock." And, as the passage from Matthew tells us, if we do not make God's love (and our generous response to it) our foundation, then we might as well make sand our foundation. As Jesus makes clear: it is not enough to SAY (though that is good)—we must also DO. Indeed, the Advent season urges us again and again to examine our lives with a view to deepening our roots in God's love and to act upon it.

Isaiah, in verses 5 and 6, also emphasizes God's special concern for the poor and suffering—yet another Advent and Christmas theme. This means that we must examine our own attitudes and actions: Are we complacent? Do we (in a subtle way, perhaps) look down on those who do not have what we have—wealth or education or connections or opportunities? Do we try to better the lives of those who do not have what we have? Are we so concerned with what we have, whether it be material goods or otherwise, that we neglect those who do not possess these things? Are we obsessed with our own self-perceived importance?

We ask God for the grace to make his love our foundation, the basis of our attitudes and actions.

- Fr. Jerry Hudson, SJ  
Math Department  
Loyola High School

*How am I called to make God's love the foundation of my life?*





## DECEMBER 6 | FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; Matthew 9:27-31

Happy St. Nicholas Day! What a joy to celebrate this man, a bishop in the early church, born into wealth, who used his inheritance to help the poor. There are countless stories of his generosity and of miracles attributed to him. By all accounts he was a man of faith who brought hope to the desperate. He was known as a secret gift-giver leaving coins in the shoes of people in need. Around the world families observe this day by giving their children small gifts of fruit, nuts and candy, often placed in their shoes as they sleep. My mother followed the tradition and I continued it with my five children. I wonder if either of us understood the origin of sharing these small gifts with our children this day. Did we associate faith and hope with the practice?

Today's readings bring us to the end of the first week of Advent. They speak of the hope, faith and the goodness of God; the very thing Nicholas offered. "Thus, says the Lord GOD: but a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard...the deaf shall hear...the blind shall see". Jesus asks two blind men who implore him to have pity on them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" They take the leap of faith and answer, "Yes, Lord...and their eyes were opened".

We do not live in gentle times. Hopelessness manifests itself in a myriad of ways causing deep sighs and silent prayers. Perhaps this Advent Nicholas can be an inspiration moving each of us to be a gift-giver of hope to another.

-Anne Hansen  
Executive Director of Ignatians West

*This Advent how am I called to be both a receiver and giver of hope?*



## DECEMBER 7 | MEMORIAL OF ST. AMBROSE

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26; Psalm 147:1-6; Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5-8

One of the hardest parts of teaching is waiting for progress. And this time of year the pressure begins to rise for teacher and student to see a payoff for a semester's investment of time and emotion. Taken literally, today's reading seems impossible and unrealistic, especially in a classroom. Maybe because it presents the extremes of an issue: One day the deaf can hear, the blind can see, and the darkness becomes light. It is easy to get tripped up and even disheartened by the dichotomy when we measure success this way. Either the student gets it or he doesn't. Either the teacher taught it or she didn't.

But how to write a good essay, or even a good sentence, for example, can't be measured this way. It is a negotiation and a series of baby steps, steps that can seem pretty tedious. Maybe this is what the reading actually means. It's not about the dichotomy. Maybe the words in the reading offer the parameters, and it is our job to fill in, each in a unique way, the baby steps that populate the spectrum between the extremes. Maybe each baby step is the success to celebrate right now, and the reading is an illustration of the beginning and of the larger goal at the end.

I'm trying to see the classroom in a different light this year, acknowledging each step or attempt to master a concept or skill. This could be how and where we, as humans, bring sight, figuratively, to the blind. In small, cumulative, and hopefully meaningful steps.

- Sarah Gacina  
The Loyalist moderator  
LHS English Department

*Am I able to celebrate the small steps I take every day?*





## DECEMBER 8 | SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” John the Baptist has always fascinated me and made me a little uncomfortable. I imagine him, wild-eyed, in his camel’s hair clothing, passionately yelling out to the masses gathered in the desert “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” The urgency in his voice very likely making people nervous, but also pushing them to the water for cleansing. And as they made their way to the water, they knew they were preparing their hearts to be filled with the Holy Spirit and fire to come.

When I think about modern day John the Baptists crying out in the wilderness, I think of my passionate daughter who is a second-year college student majoring in environmental studies. In a recent conversation, she urged me “change your ways - stop eating meat, reduce waste, take public transportation,” saying the Earth is in crisis and we need to shift the course NOW. She wanted a personal commitment from me – a baptism, if you will – to repent, to let go of my past sins against the Earth and open my heart and mind to a New Vision.

Every day I encounter modern day John the Baptists like my daughter. They challenge me to listen and be fascinated instead of giving in to my discomfort and ignoring them because what they are urging me to do will radically change my life.

- Angel Mortel  
Organizer  
LA Voice

*Who are my modern “John the Baptists”? How do they call me to change my life?*

## DECEMBER 9 | SOLEMNITY OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

Mary confused and not knowing what was going on, eventually accepted what the angel was telling her. It was difficult for her to understand what was going on, but she eventually put her entire trust in God.

How often do we put our trust in God? God works in us every single day and do we put our trust in God? He works in us through our colleagues when they give us a compliment or through our students when they thank us.

Do we accept these or do we question their motives or doubt if they were genuine or not? God wants us to trust him and give everything to him like Mary did when the Angel Gabriel came to her. God is working through our colleagues, teachers, family, and friends on a daily basis, do we trust them unconditionally like Mary trusted the Angel Gabriel?

God communicates with us in the way that we are most common with, human to human. God is trying to get through to us through our friends, colleagues, and even our students. When we are able to realize that, accept it, and listen to God, we will be at peace like Mary was. Are you willing to accept the invitation that God is giving you EVERY single day?

- Chris Walter  
Director of Student Activities  
Loyola High School

*How do I respond to the invitation to put my trust in God every day?*





## DECEMBER 10| TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 96:1-3, 10-13; Matthew 18:12-14

God not only exists but He also communicates with his believing children. There are many reasons God loves to speak with us, but one important one is because His words fill us with joy! “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” (John 15:11) Today’s readings concerning all those who are a little lost from God right now for whatever reason are a testimony to this religious reality.

God in the person of Jesus Christ is continually poised to come to your rescue should you find yourself in such a spiritual state. To allow this to happen we must let go of our prideful self-dependence and like the lost sheep described in Matthew’s Gospel humbly cry out to the Lord for help as encouraged by the prophet Isaiah. He is then sure to come and restore you in right relationship with Him!

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will He not leave the ninety-nine... and go in search of the stray? And if He finds it...He rejoices more over it than the ninety-nine that did not stray.” Lord let us pray that if we find ourselves in this state we may be obedient to this Word so that Your joy at our recovery will become our own blessed joy during this Advent season!

- Scott Johnson  
Theology Department  
Loyola High School

*How have I experienced the joy of being found?*

## DECEMBER 11 | WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 40:25-31; Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10; Matthew 11:28-30

When the Jesuit delegates to the 36th General Congregation met with Pope Francis in Rome, he invited them to ask for the grace of consolation everyday. This is important to confront the temptation to discouragement.

At times our hearts feel weighed down with so many burdens and it gets exhausting picking up the pieces and beginning again. The word of God fills our hearts with hope as it speaks of a time of consolation, refreshment, and renewal of strength in God.

The lyrics of the song “We will rise again” by David Haas, are from our first reading. “I am strength to the weary, to the weak I am new life. Though the young may grow weary, I will be their hope.”

God’s invitation to us today is to find rest in him. We find rest as we come to him with our burdens and weariness. Although we may feel like we cannot go on, and are abandoned, we are invited to trust that the Lord never forsakes us but walks alongside us, bearing the yoke with us as we humbly serve in his name. Coming to him is an act of faith. Asking for the grace of consolation teaches us the way of humble trust.

Lord I need you. Give me the joy of your salvation.

- Fr. Ike Udoh, SJ  
Pastoral Minister  
Blessed Sacrament Church

*When I grow weary what brings me consolation? Do I take time to rest in God?*





## DECEMBER 12 | FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10; Judith 13:18-19; Luke 1:26-38

Nuestra, nuestra, nuestra  
You are: Ink-carved on the chest  
of the boy in the cell whose mistakes are big  
like his heart once was.  
Nuestra, nuestra, nuestra  
You are: on the blanket of a child  
whose fever burns in a place called “ICE”,  
whose mother was taken,  
whose cry is a chorus  
in this used-to-be-Wal-Mart  
where life’s price tag is cheap  
Nuestra, nuestra, nuestra  
You are: on the card in the wallet  
of a sand-weary soldier who  
rides a soul-strewn road.  
You are: lacquered on taco truck doors  
for families whose hunger is to stay together  
You are: on the rayon hipster t-shirt  
of a ruby-lipped Chicana whose  
parents turned her out when  
she confessed who she loved.

You are: there when the mantilla of memory  
is pulled back and you humbly stand  
painted in plaster  
on my blessed mother’s mueble  
surrounded by pan dulce y cellophane candy  
with the sweetest my mother’s canela kiss  
You are: the one who brings roses in December  
and tells us the truth--blooms also have thorns.  
And you whisper to all who  
no longer see celestially  
“I will bring my cloak of stars to you”  
Nuestra, nuestra, nuestra, Señora  
We, your poor of heart, poor of pocket,  
pray like cactus, arms up  
in a desert cold with snow  
and we suddenly, as with a vision, see:  
You

Are

Ours.

- Thomas Cendajas  
LHS Theology Department

*What is my image of Mary? Who in my life is like Mary?*



## DECEMBER 13 | MEMORIAL OF ST. LUCY

Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1:1-4, 6; Matthew 11:16-19

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reacts to the people's resistance to the Gospel. He compares them to children who simply wish to be amused and not challenged. They expect instant gratification and rebel when they are met with ideas that are not like their own. Jesus condemns them for their narrow mindedness and inability to accept new perspectives.

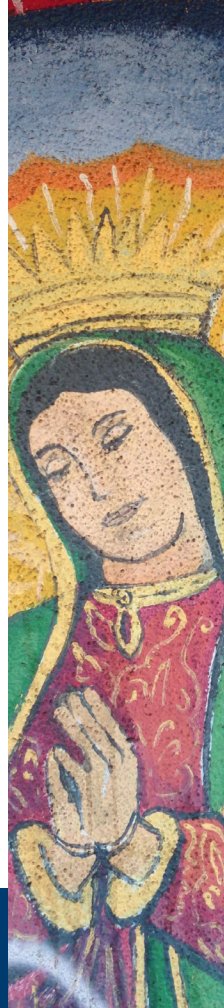
In my years in education, I have witnessed and experienced temptations to be “set in our own ways”. In the classroom, on the athletic fields, or as a school leader, sometimes it eases our minds to think that we can just continue doing things the same way and accept the “status quo”. However, my Jesuit education has always challenged me to push the limits and to constantly have a vision of a better future.

Yes, consistency is certainly important in our work, but so is vision, foresight, and growth. We do our students an injustice if we, ourselves, aren't growing and seeking to meet the ever-changing needs that each new group of students brings.

During this season of Advent, I hope to keep an open mind and an open heart to new ideas and perspectives that I encounter. I ask that St. Lucy, patron saint of sight and light, give us the strength to see past ourselves and illuminate the world for others.

- William Liu  
Dean of Enrollment Management  
Verbum Dei High School

*What areas of my life need God's light? How can I keep my mind and heart open to new sights?*





## DECEMBER 14| FEAST OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Matthew 17:9A, 10-13

Today is the Feast Day of St. John of the Cross and this saint is perhaps best known for his work, *Dark Night*. Advent is a time of shadows and lights emerging. The *Dark Night* is a poem about the journey of the soul from its bodily home to union with God. If we look at our lived experience, we become painfully aware that this journey is familiar.

In my work as the clinical director of the Center in Hollywood, I have had the opportunity to journey with people living on the streets of Hollywood. I do groups on a daily basis with people struggling with addictions ranging from crystal meth to alcohol to the internet to relationships and everything in between. I believe the gateway drug of addiction is trauma (those overwhelming experiences in life beyond what we would expect). Gerald May, M.D. defined addiction from its French root as the things that nail us down in life. I have yet to meet the first person who does not get nailed down by something.

At the heart of addictions and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is this idea that we cannot save ourselves, we need a Savior. There is no escaping the *Dark Night* of the Soul; we cannot escape suffering (the Buddha told us this 2000 years ago). When all human help is to no avail, the soul surrenders into the hands of a loving God. Who could ask for anything more this Advent season, namely journeying from this bodily home that gets nailed down by a host of inordinate attachments to union with God?

- Fr. Frank Buckley, SJ  
Clinical Director, The Center in Hollywood

*What stirs in me when I contemplate my own journey to God?*

## DECEMBER 15| THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10; PS 146:6-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

After reading this Sunday's Gospel passage Matthew 11:2-11 with Michael, who is in a California State Prison, this is his reflection: WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

"I remember a time in my life when I fell to the ground. I remember it was a time when I was at a maximum-security prison. I fell to the ground in pain while being attacked. However, the physical pain wasn't as bad as the mental anguish of what had taken place. Being of good nature and not wanting to hurt anybody with any kind of physical contact on my part led to myself being assaulted for refusing to participate in putting in work (hurting other inmates). So I was attacked. I remember having to walk through prison yards always on alert, but somehow I felt God was always with me. No matter how often I fall, God lifts me up and gives me the strength to continue on. I found comfort in praying to God even if I knew there was no hope for me to ever go home again. Then one day a group of people who came all the way from West LA gave us good news; a renewal of hope that one day I could be going home. They told us about how there are people out there who are trying to get others to listen and help change harsh sentencing laws. I am grateful to know that some people believe that people like us could be productive members of society if given the opportunity. The people who come to spend time with us each month help me to keep my faith in believing that God will find a way for me and others to open the gates from the prisons that hold us down, and prevent us from enjoying the better things in life that being free brings; whether it is freedom outside these walls, or freedom in our hearts."

- Michael's story recounted by Fr. Michael Kennedy, SJ  
Executive Director, Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative

*Do I hold things in my heart that I need to set free?*





## DECEMBER 16 | MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17A; Psalm 25:4-9; Matthew 21:23-27

“By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” - Matthew 21:23

As I reflect on the Gospel reading of the day, the word that stands out to me is authority. I normally think of authority as a strict way of enforcing rules or using your own power over others. However, when I think of Jesus and the divine authority he was given, authority looks quite different. Authority, to Jesus, is not commanding others, but rather serving others with loving kindness. Jesus encouraged others to be their true selves and stood with people who had been marginalized by society. Even under intense questioning, he remained true to God, did not reveal his divine authority, and continued to act humbly and justly.

For the last year and a half, I have served as the Campus Ministry/College Guidance Assistant at Verbum Dei High School as a Jesuit Volunteer. In this time, I have learned what using Christ-like authority means. Each day, I come to my placement I remind myself that I am here to serve the people around me. There is kindness and empowerment everywhere I look in the Verb Community. I have been able to learn what Christ-like authority looks like in a school and how to model this authority as a future leader committed to living out my faith through my actions.

-Molly Fruland  
Jesuit Volunteer  
Verbum Dei High School

*In what areas of your life do you exercise Christ-like authority of service and love?  
Are there areas in which you may need to exercise authority that is more Christ-like?*

## DECEMBER 17 | TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72:1-4, 7-8,17; Matthew 1:1-17

***Abraham became the father of Isaac...*** So begins the genealogy of Jesus, son of God and son of Mary, but as Matthew notes, so too the son of Abraham and the son of David, etc. etc. dozens of times etc. The story you're about to read, Matthew implies, is a long story; more than the story of a lifetime, it's the story of many lifetimes.

As we wade through advent, a season of hoped for things, we're reminded that what is to be has already begun. The coming of Christ is an eternal process, always and forever, already happening. Incarnation is always about us. Our people. Our lives. Our history. Our hopes.

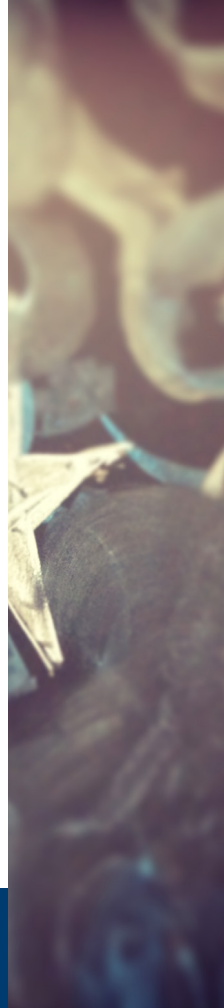
In my family, our waiting has been difficult this year - not without hope, but leaning into death and departure more than new birth. As I write this, my father is moving, day by day, into the final moments of his battle with cancer. It's been tough. In one of our last coherent conversations he asked, insisted really, if there was anything I wanted to know about his life, about our family, anything. "Now is the time to ask," he said.

I didn't immediately have much to say. Not sure where to begin. So I asked him what he wanted to know of his own father. *What would you have liked to have asked Dziadzi?* That was a good enough beginning. And so we lay next to one another in his bed, head to toe, and told old stories. Stories about fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives. My father's story, our story, is, like the story of God, one of many lifetimes.

- Fr. Brendan Busse, SJ

Associate Pastor, Dolores Mission Parish

*Advent is a time of hope and a time of memory. What stories give you hope?  
What memories fill your Advent?*





## DECEMBER 18 | WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Psalm 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19; Matthew 1:18-25

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” - Matthew 1:20

The Gospel of Matthew speaks of receiving the news of something unexpected. Joseph was told by an Angel of God that his wife, Mary is pregnant. I could only imagine Joseph's reaction, filled with surprise and maybe even doubt.

How could this be? Who or what made it possible for Mary to be with child?

Often times, life experiences filled with doubt and discomfort stray us away from what is important. The doubt causes feelings of uncertainty and fear. The discomfort disguises the divine. Joseph allowed himself to be led by courage. He took Mary, his wife, into his home and welcomed the uncertainty.

Joseph trusted in the presence of what was divine and holy. He trusted Emmanuel. He trusted that God would be with him.

How might we recognize God's divine presence in times of uncertainty?

- Cindy Torroba  
Coordinator-Office for Mission  
Loyola High School

*This Advent season, what is one way I can welcome the unknown and use it as an opportunity of growth and goodness for self and others?*



## DECEMBER 19 | THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25; Psalm 71:3-6, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard.” - Luke 1:13

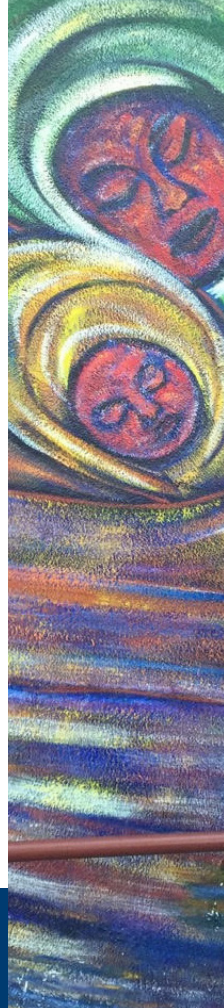
In the midst of fear it can be hard to believe that our prayers are heard. Yet, the readings of Advent tell story after story of how God accompanies people in times of great difficulty. These accounts from the past help remind us of what is also possible today. The story of Homeboy Industries is one contemporary example that shows us the power of love in the face of fear.

“In 1986, when Homeboy Industries’ founder, Gregory Boyle became pastor of Dolores Mission Church, it was the poorest Catholic parish in Los Angeles. The parish included Aliso Village and Pico Gardens, then the largest public housing projects west of the Mississippi. They also had the highest concentration of gang activity. That was saying something, given Los Angeles’ reputation as the gang capital of the world.

At the time, law enforcement tactics of suppression and criminal justice policies of mass incarceration were the prevailing means to deal with gang violence. But where others only saw criminals, Father Greg saw people in need of help. Today, Homeboy Industries is the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program in the world, welcoming thousands through our doors each year.”

- Homeboy Industries  
[www.homeboyindustries.org](http://www.homeboyindustries.org)

*How have I experienced the power of love in the face of fear?*





## DECEMBER 20 | FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-6; Luke 1:26-38

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word."

Lord,  
Allow me to be open to your will,  
Allow me to accept your plan for my life,  
Allow me to move in ways, your ways, to bring change to our troubled world,  
Allow me to get back up when I fall,  
Allow me to know that nothing is impossible for God,  
Allow me to be your handmaid,  
Allow me to return to you all those things that are yours,  
Allow me to do your will,  
Allow me to accept your love and your grace,  
Allow me to be filled knowing that that is enough for me.  
Amen.

- Frank Kozakowski  
Principal  
Loyola High School

*How do I get back up when I fall? How am I open to God's will?*

## DECEMBER 21 | SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Zephaniah 3:14-18A; Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Luke 1:39-45

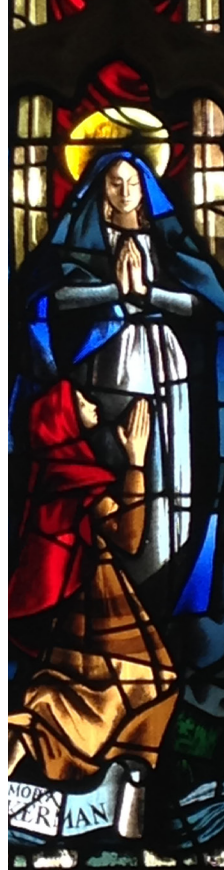
I learned the hard way not to congratulate a woman who looks pregnant unless I have personally heard the news from her or someone very close to her. I have embarrassed myself and also offended the woman. Thus, Elizabeth seems quite prophetic in declaring Mary blessed and mother of the Lord.

It is not clear whether or not Elizabeth had already heard the news from family or friends that Mary was pregnant. If Elizabeth had seen Mary walk into the house, there is no indication that Elizabeth thought that Mary looked pregnant. But it was the sound of Mary's greeting that stirred the unseen life within Elizabeth to give testimony to the presence of the unseen Savior within Mary. Even from the womb, Christ was already eliciting the desires of others.

Four lives are in this Mystery of the Visitation: two seen females and two unseen males. Yet, the unseen Christ remains at the center of the mystery, growing in humanity and in love. Christ is becoming God's hope and humanity's hope for salvation.

As we get closer to the celebration of the Feast of the Birth of Christ, let us pay attention to the signs we see of new life growing in us and in our world, but let us also remain open to the new life that may still remain unseen, that which is yet to be revealed. Blessed are we who believe that the promise made to us by the Lord would be fulfilled.

- Fr. Wayne Negrete, SJ  
Assistant Director, Center for Ignatian Spirituality, LMU  
Loyola Law School Campus Ministry



*What is being born in me as Christmas approaches? Where do I see signs of new life?*



## DECEMBER 22 | FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-6; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

Joseph's Christmas' dream reminds me of the evening when a friend stretched my dream of grad school: I received a half scholarship to NYU when I needed a full one. 'As a white guy, I'm telling you we are just taught to ask for things. You should see if anyone didn't accept their full scholarship and you should ask for it.' After that conversation, I'm now the first in my family to have graduated from college and grad school.

Shirley Chisolm's chair. Cesar's fast. Victor Jara's guitar. Moses' burning bush. Emily Dickinson's dark nights. Dreams are powerful. Stretching dreams even more so. As a community organizer at Innovate Public Schools, I have listened to hundreds of low-income parents whose dreams for their children are not being honored. We are failing the dreams of black and brown students in Los Angeles and across the nation. Will we stand firm like the Angel and awake people to stretching what's possible in our immigration, education, and economic systems? In our churches and homes? Will we pay attention like Joseph, allowing silence and the 'other' to lead the way out of our intellectual caves and our pre-determined conclusions?

Though we are tempted to only celebrate Advent and Christmas as momentous occasions of the past, if we open our hearts the same spirit that led the Angel and Joseph can be a power that stretches ourselves and our world today if we only let it. For this let us pray.

- Carlos M. Rodriguez  
Community Organizer, Innovate Public Schools  
Former Jesuit Volunteer and LMU Alumnus

*Advent is a time of impossible dreams. What dreams do I have that can be stretched?  
With whom am I called to stand and expand what is possible?*

## DECEMBER 23 | MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14; Luke 1:57-66

“When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her.” - Luke 1:57

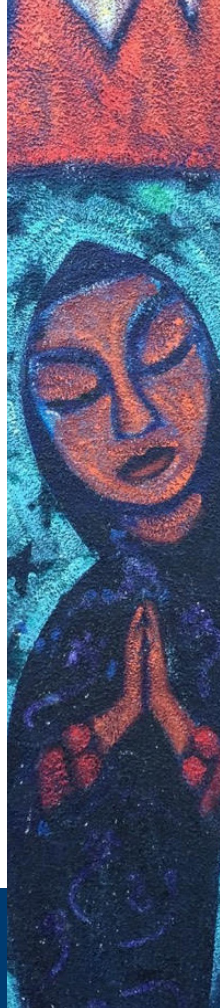
In today's reading Elizabeth and her child are surrounded with rejoicing. From next door neighbors to relatives far away, all are united in a shared response to the good news. Our sprawling Los Angeles might have little in common with the small towns of the Gospels, but the desire to celebrate good news remains as strong as ever in our digital age.

This is a truth at the heart of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, which begin with the call to recognize and praise the goodness of God's creation. This spiritual rejoicing was a shared foundation of the early Jesuits that united them through their countless journeys.

It is a practice we continue today. On immersion trips with college students, at liturgies on school campuses, in juvenile halls and state prisons, parish festivals and homes, on the streets of Hollywood, and in so many other places, we rejoice with God together. The new collaborative website, [www.IgnatianLA.net](http://www.IgnatianLA.net), provides a contemporary space to recognize these connected activities. In all the modes available to us, let us continue to find ways to share the good news!

- Bob Stephan  
Director of Ignatian Formation  
Loyola High School

*The Advent season is one full of rejoicing. What is the good news of my life? How will I share that good news with others?*





## DECEMBER 24 | CHRISTMAS EVE

The Vigil Mass: Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matt 1:18-25

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us,’” Matthew 1:23.

The name Emmanuel offers a powerful testament of the reality of God’s love for all of humanity, a promise of eternal dignity for every human being ever to exist. The often under appreciated reality of “God with us,” is that God came as a human baby! The human baby, is a completely vulnerable creature wholly unable to function in the world without the care and concern of an entire community of people around it, not exactly the expected picture of divine majesty in human form! The name Emmanuel is a powerful reminder for myself every Christmas that the beauty of the Incarnation of the Baby Jesus, lies in the reality that the Almighty Creator of the Universe became the most vulnerable creature in that Universe.

If God was willing to experience the purest form of vulnerability and trust in others in becoming a baby, are we not called to do the same this Christmas season? Are we not called to become vulnerable and willing to accept the tender love and care of our own communities, just as the Baby Jesus experienced the love of his community 2000 years ago? As you go about your Christmas celebration take a moment to reflect and become willing to embrace the beauty and divine blessing of the unparalleled love that people have shown you since you were a baby!

- Christian Astran  
Campus Ministry  
Loyola High School

*At Christmas we celebrate the radical vulnerability of God. How am I willing to extend myself to others?*



## DECEMBER 25 | CHRISTMAS DAY

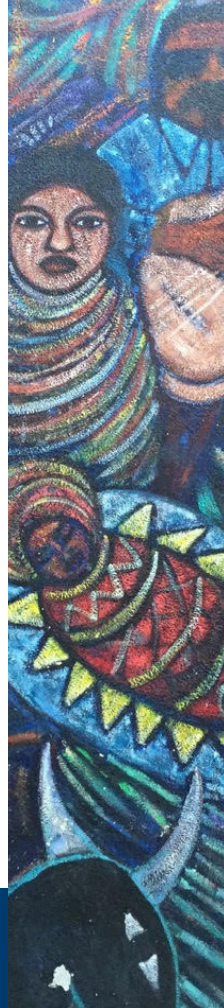
Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.  
What came to be through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race;  
the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.  
The true light, which enlightens everyone,  
was coming into the world.

And the Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth.  
-John 1:1-5, 9,14

*As we celebrate the powerful mystery of God “dwelling among us” today, how do I experience God present in my life?*



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