

Encounters of Grace:
A Community of Kinship

Advent Reflections



Loyola High School

OF LOS ANGELES



ADVENT 2020

When we share in a moment of encounter, we often discover something unexpected. Our senses tend to be heightened and we cannot help but be engaged; indifference falls by the wayside. We are attentive and attuned to the heart of an issue. We truly see or hear another person in all of their truth. We address questions we didn't know needed answers. Hearts speak to hearts...

How, or in whom, will we encounter the Light of the World this Advent/Christmas season, in this time of pandemic and in the work for racial equity, our need for healing and hope at the intersections of pandemic, race, and economic justice?

The scripture readings of the Advent/Christmas season are brimming with stories of sacred meetings unfolding in the everyday circumstances of human life. How might we make sense of our life experiences and interpret them in light of God's dreams for the human family and the ultimate encounter that is the Incarnation, in the person of Jesus -- God-with-us?

We are grateful to contributors from the Ignatian family in the greater Los Angeles region of the Jesuits West Province for joining us as we pause to reflect on the phenomenon of encounter and more...holding the tension of this unsettled time with the ongoing invitation to encounters of grace and celebrating the Advent/Christmas season.

Advent/Christmas Blessings, All!

- Ann Holmquist
Vice President for Mission
Loyola High School



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OF LOS ANGELES

A COMMUNITY OF KINSHIP

“No daylight to separate us. Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased.” - Fr. Gregory Boyle SJ, *Tattoos on the Heart*

This year's Advent prayer book invites us to kinship in a time of difficulty and uncertainty. It builds on the invitations from the international Jesuits and the Jesuits West Province to enter into deeper relationships across differences. In this time of pandemic, when we have limited opportunities to be physically near one another, we hope this collection of reflections provides an alternative opportunity to encounter others. Each encounter is a chance for deeper connection, a step toward the kinship of God.

In the following pages you will find stories of encounters, in the scriptures, in personal relationships, and in our call to community with one another. We encourage you to notice what stirs for you as you read and pray with these personal reflections. Each reflection has questions for further consideration. The first two questions come from the Jesuits West Collaborative Organizing for Racial Equity Toolkit (Link: www.jesuitswestcore.org). These questions set the frame for this year's theme. May we journey together this Advent season in that spirit of kinship.

- Bob Stephan
Office for Mission
Loyola High School

*Are we making enough progress as followers of Christ and the Ignatian tradition?
What would embolden us to risk even more for the sake of love and justice?*





NOVEMBER 29 | FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Where do we encounter God?

Can we, as instructed by St. Ignatius, find God in all things?

OR... Do we scream and shake our fist as Isaiah did in the first reading,
Why did you let us wander so far from you?

We must accept the blame ourselves. We must acknowledge our own sin and sinfulness.
But in confessing our sin we have the comfort of the knowledge that God is never far away and
that God will always be there to travel with us.

Isaiah reminds us of God's covenant.

*We are the clay and you the potter
We are all the work of your hands.*

It takes courage and faith, but give yourself over to God's plan.

I am reminded of the song, "Eye Has Not Seen" by Marty Haugen.

(Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRyOS0nZr7s)

*Eye has not seen
Ear has not heard
What God has ready
For those who love God.*

It is in that promise that we have a hope-filled future that includes healing and reconciliation.

- Frank Kozakowski
Principal, Loyola High School (LHS)



Where do I encounter God? How am I called to bring healing?

NOVEMBER 30 | FEAST OF SAINT ANDREW

Romans 10:9-18; Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11; Matthew 4:18-22

Today we honor St. Andrew the Apostle, an individual who was graced to encounter Jesus in an immediate, concrete, and profound way. Jesus invited Andrew to walk with him, to appreciate God's abiding love for each human being, and to share this appreciation with others.

Andrew, as an apostle ("one who is sent"), shared with others his experience of Jesus and of Jesus' ministry—a ministry of teaching, of healing, of loving.

We in our turn are called to do the same—at all times, but, perhaps, especially in this era in which many suffer from the effects of the pandemic. We see death, ill health, job loss, separation from family, friends, and colleagues. This is also an era of divisiveness—political, racial, and economic.

It is tempting to despair, to give up, to believe that we are helpless. It is certainly true that we cannot do everything, but it is even more true that we can, with God's help, do a great deal. It is vital that we remember that we are challenged to do God's work, to bring the appreciation of God's love into our lives and the lives of those around us.

I suggest we do the ordinary things—but with the perspective that even the simplest actions and words can be God-filled. Maybe we need not do extra things, but rather go about our daily activities in a deeper way, conscious that even the most mundane occasions are opportunities for us to demonstrate that God's faithful love is alive in our world. We ask God's help to be kind, patient, forgiving, compassionate, thoughtful and sensitive. In this way we act as genuine apostles—ones who are sent.

- Jerry Hudson, SJ
Math Department and Jesuit Community LHS

How am I sent to follow God in ordinary things?





DECEMBER 1 | TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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.” I don’t know about you, but at first glance, my eyes sure don’t seem blessed to have seen what they have seen, nor have my ears been blessed to hear what they have heard. 2020 has been in a word, exhausting.

And yet I wonder if I am not open enough to the invitation God provides us in this reading. I once participated in an Alternative Break trip through The Center for Service and Action at LMU to Guayaquil. I encountered poverty and societal injustice in often jarring ways. I also met some incredible people who were fighting against the injustice in ways that inspire me all these years later.

We visited a squatter community adjacent to a trash dump. I still recall dual smells of home cooked food fighting against the stench of garbage. The suffering was profound, and I started to cry. A woman from a local nonprofit embraced me, and as my tears poured into her shoulder she gently implored me to pick my head up and really see what was before me. “I have faith” she began, “that if you open your eyes and your heart to this moment, you will never turn away from the pain and suffering of others.”

I want to turn away from 2020. But the Gospel brings us back. A global pandemic, the continued stain of racial injustice, widening inequity... The pain is real, and immense. “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.” As we anticipate the birth of our Savior, I’d like to think this Gospel challenges us to imagine a better, more loving and more just world for ALL of God’s children.

- Patrick Furlong
Interim Director, Center for Service and Action (LMU)

What have I been “blessed” to see? How am I called to imagine a better world?

DECEMBER 2 | WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 25:6-10A; Psalm 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6; Matthew 15:29-37

I've often painted a picture in my mind of "the great crowd that came to Jesus." I imagine they were a diverse group of different ages, skin colors, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds, but they all had one thing in common: a desire and need for healing.

Forty years ago today, four Catholic missionaries - Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan - were brutally murdered in El Salvador. I remember them every year because their lives inspired me to become a missionary. I wanted to know what touched these women so deeply that they would dedicate their lives to accompanying people very different from them.

I worked in the violent, chaotic favelas of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The Brazilians I lived with were vulnerable in many ways. And, being away from all that was familiar to me, I was vulnerable in many ways. It was the encounter in this soft space of our fragile humanity that a miracle took place.

Despite being different, we were all in need of love, healing and community and when we opened ourselves to each other, we were transformed. I'm sure this is what the four churchwomen experienced and were willing to die for.

When the crowd gathered around Jesus, they were "cured" and "amazed." This Advent, let's be "cured" and "amazed" by the power of love as we encounter Jesus in the other.

- Angel Mortel
Organizer, LA Voice



When was I amazed by the power of love? Who has inspired me?



DECEMBER 3 | MEMORIAL OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, SJ

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

“Faith in Action”

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock,” Matthew 7:24-25.

The call to live out our faith through action, is one of the most consequential aspects of faith that we hear in the readings on the Feast Day of St. Francis Xavier. The call to listen and act upon the commands of the gospel is well demonstrated in the missionary legacy of one of the First Companions of the Society of Jesus. As one of the primary missionaries who spread the gospel into India, Malaysia, and Japan, St. Francis Xavier is a part of the living testimony that the wise man heeds the call of Christ by acting upon it.

As a missionary in Japan St. Francis Xavier did not ask those he was serving to adapt to his language and custom, rather he took it upon himself to learn the customs and languages of those he had been tasked with serving the Good News. A wise man indeed, St. Francis Xavier offers us a model of grounding our actions in the context in which we find ourselves located.

Advent invites all Christians to a season of Faith in Action, an invitation to wisely and authentically serve the communities in which we are located.

- Christian Astran
Campus Ministry LHS

How do I put my faith into action? How can I respond to those around me?

DECEMBER 4 | FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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

The place I see the Lord the most is in relationships with others who uphold the dignity of humankind regardless of who stands before them. The blind men in the Gospel reflect companionship shared on their path to healing. Both men are in need of healing and together cry out and profess their faith in Jesus.

A friend in Christ can surely help us to see our way through to the master healer. Whether standing together in adversity or offering truth during difficulties, we leave space for God's transforming power to work. Healing abounds when God's providence intersects with our openness to be encouraged and enlightened by companions along our way.

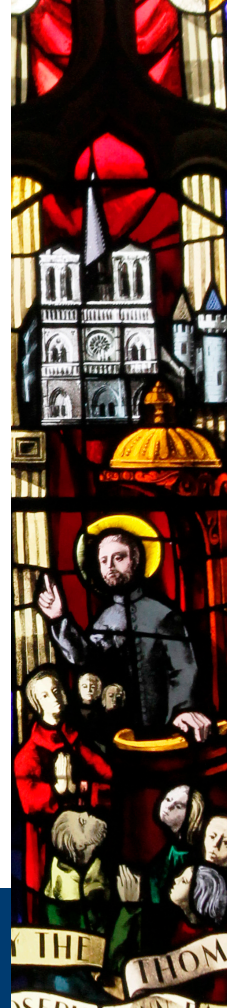
Turning a deaf ear to those in need or not seeing the "plank" in our own eye have formed obstacles to deepening relationships within the Body of Christ. Leaning into God's grace is all we need to extend ourselves a bit to illumine others' paths as we accompany them.

How far have you gone to bring others to Christ? What are the qualities that make you a good friend? When we're around faithful people, we are supported and encouraged to seek Christ.

Do you have friends that see your value and inspire you to grow closer to Christ?

- Lori Stanely
Executive Director
Loyola Institute for Spirituality

Spend time reflecting on your friendships and considering the questions above.





DECEMBER 5 | SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

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

The Gospel reading for today provides a window into the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. I never tire of these. Jesus, the great Teacher and Healer, gives authority to the Twelve to proclaim the Kingdom of God and perform miracles to cure “every disease and every illness.” This, because he was moved by pity for the “troubled and abandoned.” The implications are clear: this is a radical call to societal engagement.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to assist as translator for Monseigneur Bruguès, a Dominican priest who was at that time serving as Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education--straight from the Vatican--on a reconnaissance trip to Catholic institutions of higher education in the Midwest. It was an incredible experience. At one point, the Archbishop used a term with which I was unfamiliar (*le noyer*—hickory!!). Perceiving the panic on my face, he quickly changed the word to a more familiar wood. He had seen straight into my humanity, a deep, raw, and vulnerable place, and had responded with genuine compassion. It was a turning point for me.

That is what it must have been like to encounter Jesus Christ. Jesus’ ability to see the humanity in every individual and to respond with deep compassion and love, no matter the circumstance, defines his ministry. It is a model we must emulate. Through his grace, we can be agents of change in a society--indeed world--so desperately in need of healing. Let’s join together in a renewed zeal to stand for and with others and to build the Kingdom as we await the joyful arrival of the Christ child this Advent season.

-Lori Crawford-Dixon
Modern & Classical Languages Department LHS

How can I be an agent of change in society?

DECEMBER 6 | SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; PS 85:9-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

Preparations for Christmas are underway beginning with the readings of the day: “*A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord.*” We also hear John the Baptist proclaim, “*One mightier than I is coming after me.*”

Planning for the cherished traditions of the season are front and center as neighborhoods display colorful lights and the Elf moves from shelf to shelf inside homes with young children. Our task, as always, is to balance the spiritual nature of this season with the expectations of decorations, gift giving and family. This year the task is more complicated with the heartbreak of COVID-19, as well as economic, political, and social unrest.

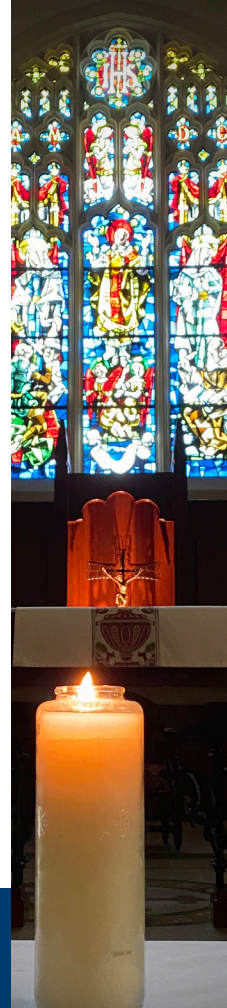
If the birth of Jesus is to make a difference in the lives of our families how do we prepare? The inclusion of nativity sets in our homes is a start but how do we give meaning to what they stand for – Jesus coming to live in our midst?

In a year like no other in a century we can start by looking at the two great commandments Jesus gave us: Love God, love our neighbor. Of the two, in my opinion, the second is more difficult. Political hyper-partisanship, advocacy for white supremacy, and disputes over mask wearing, the one thing science tells us offers protection from the coronavirus, cause us to segregate and shut each other out.

To celebrate the child who grew into the man, Jesus, whose teachings help us seek and recognize God and the goodness of God in each other, we might consider bringing intentional change to our preparations this Advent to include prayers for peace and actions for equity among all people.

-Anne Hansen
Executive Director, Ignatians West

How am I preparing this Advent? How am I welcoming Jesus in my midst?





DECEMBER 7 | MEMORIAL OF ST. AMBROSE

Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 5:17-26

The readings of today, December 7th, are reminders that we are to trust in God. Though we may be weak, scared, alone, mournful, or simply feeling as though we have little hope left, we must put our faith in the Lord.

The first passage from Isaiah reminds us specifically, that through all struggles, all losses, God will give us what we need to get through, to overcome.

Advent is a season of anticipation, of hope, and we need hope more than ever this year... Hope in God's abundant love, Hope in the promise of better days ahead, Hope in what is to come in this world and the next.

We must look around at where we are in our lives, and remember to look for God in all things, just as St. Ignatius taught. God is there in our triumphs and our tribulations, in the daily struggles and the joys of our lives. God is there in us and in all things we experience.

Let us remember that in all things, there is hope because in all things, God is there!

- Angela Reno
Director of Admissions
Loyola High School

Where are you finding hope this Advent?

DECEMBER 8 | SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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

Today, we celebrate the mysteries surrounding Mary. The Church calls attention to the mystery of her immaculate conception and points us to the angel Gabriel's announcement, leading us to await the birth of Jesus and honor Mary's intimate participation in the Incarnation... an extraordinary encounter...

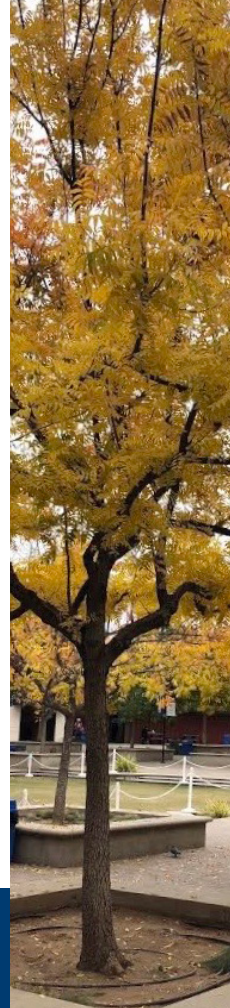
Consider this simple invitation: read and sit with the passage from the Gospel according to Luke. Then read and sit with the poem found here...allow it to speak to you where you are...

Annunciation

Even if I don't see it again—nor ever feel it
I know it is—and that if once it hailed me
it ever does—
And so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,
as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't—I was blinded like that—and swam
in what shone at me
only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

- Reprinted from *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* by Marie Howe.
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<https://onbeing.org/poetry/annunciation>

How do I give and receive love?





DECEMBER 9 | WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

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

The year 2020 has been full of unexpected life circumstances. Some disappointing, yet eye opening. Some experiences full of sorrow and some full of happiness. Since the beginning of March, liturgy celebrations have been cancelled due to the pandemic. The celebration of Liturgy provides me with comfort, a source of hope and healing. My role as cantor and being able to serve the parish community allows me to feel a sense of belonging to God and with the community. As the months have come and gone, my anxiety has grown strong since this opportunity to celebrate and pray with my parish community has diminished.

Nine months into the pandemic, this opportunity currently exists in zoom virtual prayer rooms. As our world is trying to navigate the uncertainty of many things that are troubling our world, I have found new sacred ground in virtual community prayer groups I am invited to. Being able to express and lift my own prayers to God through song has carried me through difficult moments in life. This new norm of virtual communion and community definitely is not the same as it is in person. But it has brought me back to being able to have a prayerful space with those who crave the same spiritual nourishment.

Advent, a liturgical season of hope still unfolds amidst all that is happening in the world. Like myself, many friends have experienced a death of a loved one due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not the only prevalent pandemic that looms over our current reality. The pandemics of racism, inequality, abuse and injustice towards God's people sit at the forefront of our minds. For this, my prayer for Advent 2020 is to await in hope. Hope for individuals who are affected by the repercussions these pandemics have caused. And of course, hope that one day soon, we may physically gather in a space - to be with each other, pray with each other, and pray for one another in God's house.

- Cindy Torroba
Office for Mission LHS

Where do I find community now? What supports me in our virtual reality?

DECEMBER 10 | THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 41:13-20; Psalm 145:1,9,10-11,12-13AB; Matthew 11:11-15

Consider today's readings in reverse order.

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force.” (Matthew 11: 11-12). Climate changes with fires and hurricanes; the Pandemic with sickness, death and economic hardship; political and religious upheaval; and humanity's divisiveness: have we have worn out our welcome with God?

The Psalm tells us: “Your Kingdom is a Kingdom for all ages, and your dominion endures through all generations.” We are asked to respond and believe: “The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, and of great kindness.” Advent is a time of hope, of belief that God is, has been, and always will be with us. It is the message of this season, to put our faith in the LORD, to believe that “The LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.”

Do we believe that there is good in all of us? How can we see this good and come together when we suffer from systemic racism, bigotry, the fear of being powerless to balance the scales and change hundreds of years of inequality?

Isaiah tells us: “I will set in the wasteland the cypress, together with the plane tree and the pine, that all may see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this.” What an image, such different trees growing together in a wasteland. Can this be?

In Advent, we hear the Angel Gabriel say to Mary, “Nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1: 37).

-Liam Mennis
Ignatian Conversations LHS

How are you finding the good in others?



DECEMBER 11 | FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

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

“I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go...” Today’s reading invites us to follow the teachings of the Lord, for he will lead us to the path of righteousness. With the events of 2020 seared into our memory, our faith is being challenged in ways that we could not have imagined only a year ago. As we have wrestled with COVID-19, the Movement for Black Lives and Racial Equity, severe economic ramifications, and a tumultuous election season, it has caused us to question not only the integrity of many of our American institutions, but also many of our relationships with friends, neighbors, and loved ones. We can’t escape the cry from every street corner and mountaintop that we center human dignity and provide equal opportunities for life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Never has it been more evident that we must lean on one of our foundational Ignatian values, “A Faith that Does Justice.”

Our national reality invites us to reach a new level of consciousness, commit to building new relationships, see with new eyes, and live our Mission intentionally in the most prophetic way. Let’s cherish our many blessings that our communities afford us, including bringing together a diverse group of people with a multitude of backgrounds, lived experiences, home contexts, and disparate aspirations with the ultimate goal of being a beacon of light and hope for our world. Bound together by our Jesuit mission and Ignatian charism, we have a precious opportunity to learn from each other, grow to love each other as we are as we invest in understanding our unique stories and the richness of our cultures. We will seek to promote justice in a way that creates space at the table for everyone.

- Jamal Adams
Director, Office of Equity and Inclusion LHS

What is God teaching me? What have I learned in 2020?

DECEMBER 12| FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Zechariah 2:14-17; Judith 12:18-19; Luke 1:26-38

The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe has many moments that capture our imagination, but among the most memorable is the image of roses in the snow. Juan Diego is told by Mary to go to a wintry hillside, and there indeed he finds flowers, gathers them into his tunic to bring as proof of the apparition. Upon unfolding his cloak, roses tumble to the ground, and the stunning image of the Virgin of Guadalupe shines a light into December.

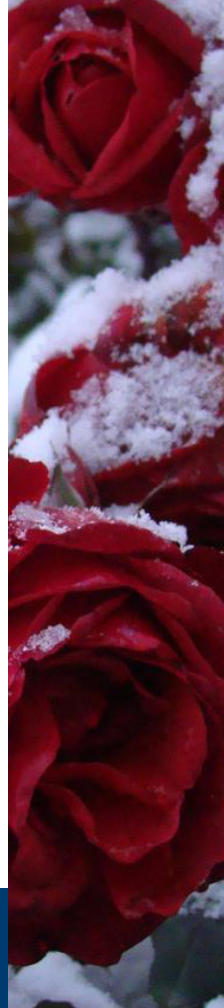
We may reflect: What do we carry with us, blooms or thorns, that transform to reveal God's presence when we let them go? Where is our evidence of hope, even in winter's doubt?

While fresh roses in icy snow feel miraculous, the reality of God's amazing gift of nature is around us every day. The diverse trees and flowers in our lands show a unity that testify to God's hope for us. But this wondrous creation will leave us if we don't preserve it, and the first impacts are on the very people that Our Lady appeared to and promised to help. Indigenous people are even now suffering the effects of climate change.

We pray: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Protectress of the Americas, inspire in us a spirit of action, so that we may all care for the Earth and see our most humble and vulnerable as the "rose bearers" they are.

- Thomas Cendejas
Theology Department LHS

How am I called to join with Our Lady of Guadalupe to protect our vulnerable land and people?





DECEMBER 13 | THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 61:1-2A, 10-11; LK 1:46-50, 53-54; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

The Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, “Gaudete” being the Latin word for rejoice. In addition to being told to rejoice always, we read of the witnessing of Isaiah, as well as that of Mary in the responsorial psalm and of John the Baptist in the gospel. They all bear witness to what God has done for all people.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures we read of the many occasions from which rejoicing can be drawn and such events are not different from what causes rejoicing today. These include marriage, the birth of a child, a good harvest and recovery from an illness. The most basic and greatest source of joy, though, is God’s action on behalf of His people.

After being thought of as an Elijah-like figure, John makes it clear that he is neither Elijah nor the Messiah; he is to prepare the way for the Lord. The Gospel, as mentioned, puts emphasis on John’s witnessing to the one who is to come after him.

The theme of witness is not limited to this part of John’s Gospel. Jesus as the revealer and revelation of God bears witness to the One who sent him. As the primary and most important witness, Jesus enables us to know who God is and what He wills. During Jesus’ public ministry, the Father bears witness to Jesus. Near the end of this ministry, he promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit will witness to him in future generations.

John’s witness, in addition, provides an example to us. We witness what we believe to be the truth about God and Jesus. We are to stand along with John and the other great witnesses as we bear witness to the God who became human and lived among us. In this we are to “rejoice always.”

- Fr. Mike Scully, SJ
Pastoral Minister and Jesuit Community, LHS

How do I bear witness to God? How do my actions reflect the example of Jesus?

DECEMBER 14 | MEMORIAL OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

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

Encounter

When I consider a teacher's role in the formation of young men for and with others, I focus on each encounter with a student. In the hectic rush of each school day, it can be difficult to be fully present for each encounter with a student. In this time of remote learning, the challenge can feel insurmountable. Our attention is divided; our thinking hurried; our emotions on edge. But it is vital to be present because each encounter with a student presents an opportunity for formation.

As I reflect on these encounters with students, I realize that our ultimate goal for these young men is to form them and prepare them for their encounter with the world. The cultivation of the virtues of the grad-at-grad provides our students with the tools to face the world as individuals.

We prepare them as best we can for this encounter, and then we set them free to discover the world on their own. Our care for them resembles the loving care of a parent. We know we cannot accompany these young men forever, so we must prepare them to move through the world without us. They carry our efforts and our love with them, but their encounter with the world will be uniquely their own

- John Vella
English Department LHS

How do I encounter the world? How do I help others prepare for this encounter?

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A vertical stained glass window on the left side of the page. It features a central figure in a white and gold robe with hands clasped in prayer, standing next to a figure in a red and gold robe holding a sword. The background is filled with various colored glass panes in shades of blue, red, and gold.

DECEMBER 15 | TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-19, 23; Matthew 21:28-32

In seasons of darkness, we can easily fall prey to forgetting God, leaning on other worldly things, or seeking something to fill the void of light that we crave. In this month of December, we exist in the darkest month of the year, and not only that, but 2020 has been one of the most difficult years many of us have faced. But that does not negate the fact that God is still with us and expects our trust through trial and tribulation.

Zephaniah 3 reminds us of our shortcomings and God's want for us to love God, reading, "In the LORD she has not trusted, to her God she has not drawn near. For then I will change and purify the lips of the peoples, that they all may call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one accord."

Through humility we recognize what we have, we fortify our trust in our foundation and we seek united ways to move forward. Covid19 altered 2020 beyond what anyone could imagine, taking away our in-person classes, high school dances, sports events, and even traditional graduation. But in this stripping of things we loved, we were forced to re-focus on what we still had, relationships, both with people and with God. During this Advent season I pray we can continue to grow in our relationships with both people and the God that came down as person in Jesus Christ. And Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. Jesus came for you and Jesus came for me, so let us hold on to the love of God and one another during this special season.

- Josh Mayfield
Campus Ministry LMU

How can I grow the relationships I have with others and with God?

DECEMBER 16 | WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 45:6C-8, 18, 21C-25; Psalm 85:9-14; Luke 7:18B-23

In today's readings, we encounter two aspects of God. On the one hand, Isaiah proclaims God's grandeur as the creator and sustainer of all that is. On the other hand, Luke tells us of Jesus' answer to the question posed by John the Baptist's disciples by pointing to his ministry of healing to the sick and proclaiming the Good News to the poor.

At times it's easy to think that these two aspects of God are mutually exclusive. Perhaps this was what motivated John to send his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Perhaps John expected Jesus to show the power proclaimed by Isaiah; that Jesus will bring swift judgement upon all injustice and restore Israel to earthly glory. Perhaps Jesus' ministry failed to match John's ideas of the coming Kingdom.

However, we are blessed with the gift of hindsight. We, as Church, know that our God who makes justice descend from the heavens is also the one who heals the sick and proclaims the Good News of salvation. Jesus lets salvation bud forth and restores the sick and the poor to the fullness of human dignity, to take their rightful place in the ranks of God's children.

To follow Jesus is to share in his work of restoring dignity to all who have been forgotten and mistreated in this world. For while we await his birth, it bears remembering that we await the coming of the one who is to come, the one who is the glory and vindication of all of God's people.

- Dennis Marzan, SJ,
Campus Ministry LHS

How can I help restore the dignity of those who have been forgotten or mistreated?





DECEMBER 17 | THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

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

Unsurprisingly, today's readings portend the birth of Jesus. Catholics everywhere recognize that the word 'Advent' denotes the arrival of something or someone noteworthy. In the wake of a polarized election, the outcry for racial justice, and a seemingly unceasing pandemic, our country, more than ever, has anticipated the coming of anything significant.

The most obvious parallel found in today's readings is that the Christ child will deliver those promises as his lineage proves that he is the prophesied Savior; however, what energizes me most was not the prognostication of hope itself, but the actions that we must take as we endure the suspense of things to come.

"Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob, listen to Israel, your father."

Expectancy is not complacency. Jacob emphatically demands that his sons engage in community action - to "assemble and listen." The pitfalls of social isolation, that is, to withdraw from one another and to not attend to one another, are counterproductive to the promise of justice.

In many ways, community organizers have presaged our collective responsibility to each other. Attuned to the aches of the most marginalized in our society, they actively have sought to awaken us from our inertia.

Today, we are called to "assemble and listen" - across generations, across the political aisle, and across whatever prevents us from recognizing our inherent and shared dignity. The time is now.

- Kaitlin Pardo
Modern & Classical Languages Department LHS

How am I "assembling and listening" to others and to God?

DECEMBER 18 | FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

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

“Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.”

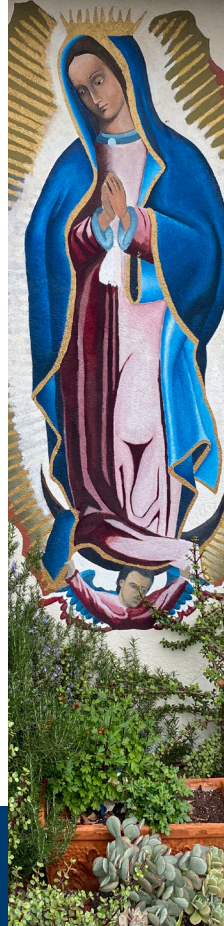
As I pray with this psalm, I am struck by the wisdom and prescience of God. By acknowledging the goal of justice, God knows that injustice is a reality. God hears the cry of the poor and sees the sores of the afflicted. God understands that our world prioritizes wealth, power, and privilege at the cost of our fellow human beings and environment. And while this psalm sounds like a celebration, I believe it is a call to action.

I believe that God is calling us to change our society into one that shelters the homeless, gives a living-wage to the working family, distributes the excessive wealth of the powerful, prefers the diversity of the human family, and cares for our common home.

As we continue preparing for the coming of Jesus, I pray for the grace of reflection and energy. May I look at my students, colleagues, family, and neighbors and ask where I can contribute to justice and peace.

May I look at the example of Jesus, a preacher who was not afraid to call out the inequities and injustices of his time. May I work towards the goal of justice and fullness of peace forever.

-Vianney Truong
Science Department LHS



How am I called to follow the example of Jesus?



DECEMBER 19 | SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25A; Psalm 71:3-4A, 5-6AB, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25

‘This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.’

It long troubled me that Elizabeth was disgraced among her people for something over which she had no control. It especially bothered me that she carried shame into her old age...an elderly woman, still made to believe she was unworthy of belonging with her people because of her very personhood. The systemic mores of her time relegated her to a place of shame.

We know the story doesn’t end there, but the line remains in the telling, and begs the question: what are the systemic mores of our time that connote disgrace or shame? In light of our current context, the answer can be overwhelming when I consider taking on systemic mores that leave any person without their inherent dignity.

Advent brings us into the mystery of the Incarnation -- the person of Jesus -- God-with-us. And, I am reminded that Jesus’ ministerial vision rejects the status quo and focuses on righting relationships, healing through word and touch, honoring the dignity of all persons. He gives humankind the ethical thought and practice upon which to build positive, productive quality of life. And he often shows us how, one person at a time.

- Ann Holmquist
Vice President for Mission LHS

How am I called to reject the status quo? To follow Jesus’ ministerial vision?

DECEMBER 20 | FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

But she was greatly troubled at what was said... In our new culture of remote-everything (learning, working, etc.), we may have received at least one “zoom invite” if not multiple one’s since beginning our remote lifestyle of being. With joy (or other feeling) we either “accepted,” “declined” or clicked “maybe.”

For young Mary, there was no “zoom” invite to ponder on before accepting--no subject line. But there was, it seems, some indication. According to Luke’s Gospel, Mary was greatly “troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” [Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you]. I wondered about this...had this greeting been her “subject line?” Why did Luke place this one phrase in such a dramatic fashion as if inviting the reader into the mind and confusion that was Mary’s?

Perhaps the Annunciation--which marks the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, during which she is told that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God--is more than an announcement or statement of what is to come, but an invitation that could be accepted [or not]. In her wisdom, Mary asked questions, wondered about the greeting’s meaning; like our Cubs, she was curious, filled with wonder, and interrogated sources of information and then, after all was examined, “clicked accept” to the Angel’s invitation.

There are, I believe, invitations all around us. Some formal and others informal and, still, others, that we cannot see unless we are fully present to the moment. Advent is about waiting for that invitation.

- Jesse Rodriguez
Director, Center for Service and Justice LHS

What invitations am I pondering? Do I recognize all of the invitations in my life?





DECEMBER 21 | MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Song of Songs 2:8-14; PS 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Luke 1:39-45

One of my daily intentions is remembering that every person is made in the image of God. This task is uncomplicated when I think of my family. However, some in our lives make this a bit more challenging. It helps me to reflect on how each person came into this world...as a vulnerable, innocent, and beautiful child delivered by the grace of God and through the strength of women like Mary, Elizabeth, and our mothers.

At the time I write this, my wife and I are quickly approaching the birth of our first child, Micah.

Therefore, this Gospel about Elizabeth's infant leaping "in her womb" hits home differently this year. Personally, I can attest that there has been quite a bit of leaping going on inside her womb. These inner movements are Micah's reaction to music, our voices, and most anything she consumes.

As it has been the case for many other Catholics, this year was the longest we had gone without receiving the Eucharist. Recently, our pastor visited us in our home to distribute the Sacrament of Communion. In those prayerful moments upon reception, I realized that as my wife received the Body of Christ, so would Micah, and therefore this encounter with the living Christ would cause him to also joyfully "leap in the womb."

May we all strive to continually recognize Christ in one another!

- JP Ramirez
Campus Ministry LMU

How do I recognize Christ in others?

DECEMBER 22 | TUESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

1 Samuel 1:24-28; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-8; Luke 1:46-56

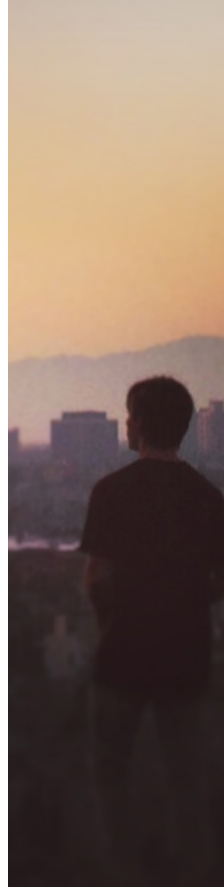
My family has found a silver lining during the COVID pandemic. We have spent some time together binge watching old shows and movies. Recently, we went back and watched all 4 seasons of the Good Place. Don't worry. I won't give anything away.

The show is about a group of individuals who die and have to work out their insecurities, faults, and fears in order to get into the "Good Place" (eternal paradise). The point of the show is that we save one another through our deepest relationships. Now, to some extent, that is not exactly the Catholic message. In our faith, God works through all of us so that we can find redemption. But, I do think there is something amazing to learn.

We are living through such a difficult time of uncertainty, fear and social division. And, it is often not so clear if we are acting in a way that is good or bad. In one of the scenes of the Good Place, a character, Eleanor, asks what she can do in a time of such uncertainty. Her friend, Janet, answers that it is precisely the uncertainty that gives meaning. If we knew all the answers, there would be no need for creativity.

It is during this time that we can live in the moment, inspired by God's grace, to support and love one another. It is precisely that creative and personal love that can lift us all up so that we can find redemption and salvation during this time period of waiting and hope.

- James Zucker
Social Studies Department LHS



How am I being called to creativity and love in this Season?



DECEMBER 23 | WEDNESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

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

“And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears?”

Today’s readings from Malachi pose an important question for us: When we encounter the Lord, will we be ready? On that day, who among us will feel truly ready to stand before the Lord?

One of my favorite exams involves reflecting on three questions at the end of the day: What have I done for myself today? What have I done for others today? What have I done for God today? If I don’t have an answer for all three of these questions when reflecting on my day, then I make it my intention for the next day. This year, as we near the end of the Advent season, let us reflect on the ways that we have taken care of ourselves, those around us, and our relationship with God.

Even though we are all socially distant, how can we grow closer to others and still find ways to encounter those who may need the comfort of community most? Now more than ever we understand our call to care for others and how connected we all really are. May we continue to answer this call today and throughout this upcoming Christmas season. So again I ask, what have you done for God today?

- Alyssa Perez
Center for Service and Action, LMU

*What have I done for myself today? What have I done for others today?
What have I done for God today?*

DECEMBER 24 | CHRISTMAS EVE

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16; Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29; Luke 1:67-79

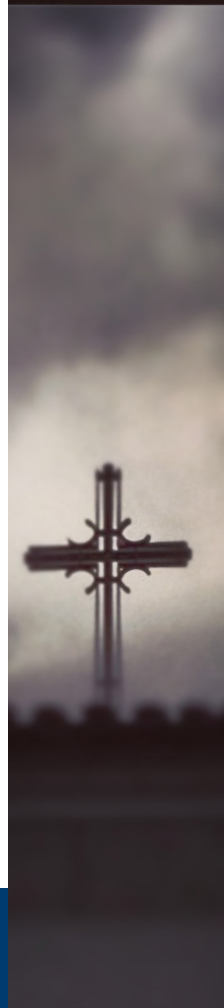
“The Coming Light in the Darkness of Bigotry and Racism”

“You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace,”
Luke 1:76-79.

The Song of Zechariah in the Gospel of Luke proclaims the coming of his own son John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for the coming of his own cousin Jesus Christ. In Zechariah's song of praise we hear aloud the promise of a coming beacon of light that will cast away the darkness of suffering and death. The promise of peace that we see in this gospel is not automatic, Jesus himself died trying to guide others into the peace that Zechariah so beautifully foretold. Peace and respite from the hateful darkness of the world does not come automatically, it requires a sustained effort of enlightenment to challenge our community to become a place of true fellowship.

Jesus' coming birth is a moment of joy, but also a call to action to address the darkness of hate and racism that we see so starkly in our community right now. The Christmas Season is a joyous call to action to radically bring about a rebirth of our communities into the light of true fellowship and understanding.

- Christian Astran
Campus Ministry LHS



Where do I find the light in my life? How can I share that light with others?



DECEMBER 25 | THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Mass During the Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Ps 96: 1-3, 11-13; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” (John 1).

Jesus - what can I possibly proclaim on this special day in which we celebrate the reality that God became human at your birth? Tell me more of my Word Scott. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Sit with that TRUTH Scott. Now what do you receive by believing in this Word? HOPE Lord. A hope which can never fail me because it is built on a divine foundation.

And I can thus look at the present world, with whatever its present challenges, and remain confident that things will ultimately work out. This helps me more consistently stay calm and peaceful whatever the circumstances of life. Thank you so much Jesus for this wonderful blessing in these particular times! “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

- Scott Johnson
Theology Department LHS

How do I encounter God? What message does God have for me?

CHRISTMAS DAY

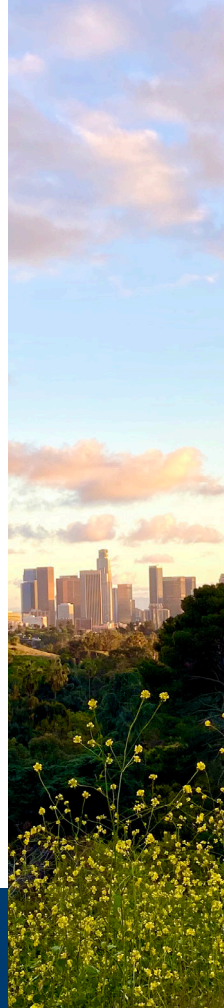
Mass During the Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

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

Let us celebrate God dwelling among us throughout this Christmas season!





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