



PREPARE THE WAY
COMMUNITY PRAYERS
ADVENT 2008

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD!

We begin our journey once more through the Christian year: Advent has come again. Advent is a joyful season. It is a time of hope amid crisis, light in deep darkness, a growing sense of expectation, a growing trust in the promises of God. Advent offers a way of looking at the world and our troubled human problems that may seem senseless at first. “Do not be afraid,” the angel tells Mary. A nervous mother listens to the hopes of her heart. A prophet stirs the people to action, encourages their expectation of a coming age of justice and peace. Wake up! The news will be good, even if, like the Judeans of Jesus’ time, we have “almost ceased to believe that it could ever come to pass.”

As you journey through Advent, I hope you find this prayer book to be a way to be intentional about ordering your days and your time, not around the things our culture tells us we are to be about, but around God and God’s people. Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel writes in his wonderful little book *Sabbath* that we spend so much energy filling up our space that we forfeit our time. “There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern” (p. ix).

This Advent, let go of the need to control space, to acquire things, and instead, through this prayer book, enter into the presence of God. Bring rhythm to your days by beginning and ending each day in prayer and reflection. In doing this, we prepare the way of Lord to be known in our heads, our hearts, and our hands that we might be a people fully centered on who God is and who God desires us to be.

It is my prayer that all of us experience the goodness of bringing rhythm and order to our lives *through* prayer, even if just for this season of Advent, and that it be a blessing to each one of us and our community.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Aaron

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER MANUAL

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances.

Psalm 119:164

This prayer book is based largely on the rhythms and format of *The Divine Hours* books by Phyllis Tickle. These prayer manuals guide Christians in a modern expression of a centuries-old practice: praying at fixed hours each day, in one voice with people all over the world. The prayers, or “offices,” offered here are not entirely original material; our Christian tradition is ripe with prayerful expressions that still hold meaning and power for today’s practice. A blessing, and the uniqueness of *this* book, is the contribution of members of the ResCov community to each evening’s office. Prayers and reflections for the congregation have been crafted out of individuals’ prayers and reflections on the lectionary texts for the Advent season. We hope the prayers shared here are a blessing for the time and space we occupy together, both in the sanctuary and on our own journeys.

You will find printed here daily offices for each day of Advent, through the Saturday following Christmas; the morning prayers are to be observed between the hours of 6 and 9 a.m., and the evening prayers between the hours of 5 and 8 p.m. each day. The morning offices are adaptations (used by permission) of selections from *The Divine Hours for Christmastide* by Phyllis Tickle; the evening offices are compositions out of our own community. Prayers taken directly out of *The Divine Hours* are noted with this (❖) symbol. Scripture is taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

At the beginning of each week, you will find the lectionary texts for that week, as well as the standard text for the Lord’s Prayer, which is included as part of each morning office. The full text of all other elements are printed within the daily prayers and readings.

Within the passages you will find asterisked (*) notations; these don’t signal a note at the bottom of the page, but a *breath* to be taken—a reminder to slow down. These offices are intended to be *prayed*, not just read. Use them as opportunities to calmly sink into the wonder of the Advent, and to connect deeply with the God of all Seasons. Use them to help pace the rhythm of your life each day this Advent season.

Experiment with how you pray these words. Pray contemplatively in your heart; pray out loud, alone or in a group; sing the hymns and songs you find on these pages! Carry the words with you throughout the day; let them sink into your soul as God transforms your spirit to meet his.

And when you feel like you don’t have time to pray, or that you have the wrong attitude to pray—pray anyway! Refuse to discount the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome whatever barriers of self you may be unable to get by.

As you pray, remember that we are all praying, with one voice and one expectation, one hope in the Risen and Coming Christ, whose birth we celebrate this season.

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 6, 2008

Lectionary Texts:

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Isaiah 64:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in Heaven – hallowed be Thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

“Whoever sings, prays twice.”

~ St. Augustine

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,* in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Psalm 111:1

THE GREETING

But I hope continually,* and will praise you yet more and more.

Psalm 71:14

THE REFRAIN

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

THE PSALM

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!* . . . O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.* . . . But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

Psalm 80:1-2, 4-6, 17-18

THE REFRAIN

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Almighty God, give all of us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* ✠

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.* Give thanks to him, bless his Name. *Psalm 100:4*

THE REFRAIN

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

Isaiah 64:4

THE GOSPEL LESSON

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Mark 13:32-37

THE REFRAIN

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

Isaiah 64:4

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Beware! Keep alert! Watch! Be on guard! Keep awake!

These are commands we may find difficult to associate with this time of year. As autumn draws to a close, temperatures slide, and our thoughts turn to the holidays, it is not watchfulness or alertness we feel. This season, we find ourselves eating more, sleeping more, and hunkering down for the cold and dark days of winter.

But you call us to be prepared. To watch. To keep awake.

While our bodies want to fall into a posture of laziness, you command that we be on our guard.

You do not want us to miss what is coming.

You do not want us to miss how you are moving.

You do not want us to miss you.

Lord, in the days ahead—as we read your word; as we are gathered to one another and are sent out; as we pray together and reflect on the season of your coming—we ask that you help us to maintain an alert posture and a watchful pose.

Open our eyes to the evidence of your coming provided throughout your creation. Open our hearts and minds to receive you.

Prepare us, Lord, we pray. *Amen.*

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

My mouth is filled with your praise,* and with your glory all day long. *Psalm 71:8*

THE GREETING

O God, from my youth you have taught me,* and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. *Psalm 71:17*

THE REFRAIN

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus . . . *1 Corinthians 1:4*

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.* You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.* But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.* We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.* We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. *Isaiah 64:4-7*

THE REFRAIN

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus . . . *1 Corinthians 1:4*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Sing to the LORD a new song;* sing to the LORD, all the earth.
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;* he is to be revered above all gods. *Psalm 96:1, 4*

THE REFRAIN

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. *Mark 13:33*

THE HYMN

Rejoice! Rejoice, believers, and let your lights appear!
The evening is advancing, and darker night is near.
The Bridegroom is arising and soon he will draw nigh;
Up, watch in expectation! At midnight comes the cry.

See that your lamps are burning, replenish them with oil;
Look now for your salvation, the end of sin and toil.
The marriage feast is waiting, the gates wide open stand;
Rise up, you heirs of glory, the Bridegroom is at hand!

Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear;
Arise, you Sun so longed for, above this darkened sphere!
With hearts and hands uplifted, we please, O Lord, to see
The day of earth's redemption, and ever be with thee!

Laurentis Laurenti

THE REFRAIN

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

Mark 13:33

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Great and merciful God, we give thanks for the incredible gift of your grace, which we know we do not deserve. Father in heaven, you know the depths of our hearts, and the magnitude of our sins, yet you love us the same. Help us to both understand and believe in this amazing love that you have for each and every one of us, despite even the worst of sins that we may have fallen into.

God, it was your hands that made us, and it is your hands that continue to shape and mold our lives every day. We pray that you would continue to mold us into who you have intended us to be from the very beginning. Mold us, Lord, until we reflect your perfect love and light to the world; make us into who you want us to be, and forgive us when we falter. Forgive us even when we fail to believe in our own capabilities that only you could have given us. We know that all things are possible through you.

Father, we give thanks for your great love and mercy. We know that in Christ we are a new creation. Our slates have been wiped clean, yet sometimes we continue to hold on to our past, allowing it to become a heavy burden. God, grant us freedom from the burden of the sins of our past. When we forget that you have made us new in Christ, help us to not only remember this truth, but to believe it.

Gracious God, be present in our daily lives; help us to remember the truth that you have spoken—that we are saints called by you. Help us to know and experience the glorious freedom that can only come through knowing Christ our Savior. God, we give thanks for this incredible gift. *Amen.*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O come, let us sing to the Lord;* let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.* Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;* and let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 95:1-2

THE GREETING

To you I lift up my eyes,* O you who are enthroned in the heavens!* As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,* and the eyes of the maid to the hand of her mistress,* so our eyes look to the LORD our God,* until he has mercy upon us.

Psalm 123:1-3

THE REFRAIN

Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever.*
Now consider, we are all your people.

Isaiah 64:9

THE NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

THE REFRAIN

Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever.*
Now consider, we are all your people.

Isaiah 64:9

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O LORD, open my lips,* and my mouth will declare your praise.* For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.* The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;* a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51:15-18

THE REFRAIN

He will judge the world with righteousness* and his peoples with his truth.

Psalm 96:13b

THE GOSPEL LESSON

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Mark 13:32-37

THE REFRAIN

He will judge the world with righteousness* and his peoples with his truth.

Psalm 96:13b

REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

We don't know the year, the day, or the hour, but Christ will come again, so we must watch and be ready!

Mark tells us that this second coming is like a guard watching a house; you must always stay in position and be ready, for you never know when the owner may arrive back home (Mark 13: 35-37). What Mark is presenting in this Gospel Lesson is not just a teaching—it's a way to be prepared and to continue good work. This is how to be ready for Christ's second coming! We may not know when it is, but we can have faith that God knows when His son will return; if we are not ready, there is no one to blame but ourselves. It is a challenge to us, as individuals and as a church, to take this warning into our everyday lives. How can we prepare ourselves for the Son of Man's return? How can we keep watch over the house? We do not live in fear or constant concern that it may be tomorrow, but live as constant reminders that it WILL happen and that we must pass the message along; this warning will outlive us. As Mark says in verse 31, “Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

Lord, God, we pray for your guidance to live out Your work—in our own lives, in the church, in the community, and in the world. You see us, O Lord; may we not be caught asleep! We don't know the year, the day, or the hour, but Christ will come again! Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Make vows to the LORD your God and perform them;* let all who are around him bring gifts to the one who is awesome . . .

Psalm 76:11

THE GREETING

With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;* I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.

Psalm 54:6

THE REFRAIN

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

A READING

‘Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin . . .’

Mark 3:28-29

THE REFRAIN

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

THE MORNING PSALM

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!* You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.* . . . But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;* the LORD hears when I call to him. You have put gladness in my heart* . . .

Psalm 4:1, 3, 7a

THE REFRAIN

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:3

THE LORD’S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come, let us sing to the LORD;* let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving;* let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!* For the LORD is a great God,* and a great King above all gods.* In his hand are the caverns of the earth;* the heights of the mountains are his also.* The sea is his, for he made it,* and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

Psalms 95:1-5

THE REFRAIN

God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

THE PSALM

'Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now rise up,' says the LORD;* 'I will place them in the safety for which they long.*' The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.* You, O LORD, will protect us;* you will guard us from this generation forever.* On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among humankind.

Psalms 12:5-8

THE REFRAIN

God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Awake.

I confess my drowsiness, my mechanical response to the world around me.

In all honesty, I am not convinced of the urgency.

You will return, Lord, and I will hide behind my meaningless laboring.

But I yearn for a new pulse.

A freedom.

An energy.

An expectation.

I ache to be

AWAKE.

Not busy. Not productive. Not accomplished.

AWAKE!

Your advent brings hope, vigilance.

My God, help me to be faithful to that vigilance.

May the urgency infuse my soul,

Compelling me to watchfulness.

Compelling me to obedience.

Compelling me to action.
Come thou long expected Jesus!
Born to set thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee. †

I will watch.

I will wait.

I will keep awake.

And my laboring will not be meaningless.

You will come and restore creation.

And we will be free.

Praise be to the coming Lord.

[†Charles Wesley]

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m..

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Know that the LORD is God.* It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:3

THE GREETING

Your decrees are very sure;* holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

Psalm 93:5

THE REFRAIN

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus . . .

1 Corinthians 1:4

THE GOSPEL LESSON

‘But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,* and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.* Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.* ‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.* So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.* Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.* Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’

Mark 13:24-31

THE REFRAIN

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus . . .

1 Corinthians 1:4

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come and see what God has done:* he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.* He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations*—let the rebellious not exalt themselves. *Psalm 66:5-7*

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

THE PSALM

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!* . . . O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.* . . . But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

Psalm 80:1-2, 4-6, 17-18

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

As we contemplate what God will have us be about in our life together this coming year, we find ourselves focused on the present needs of our city and world. This Advent, we actively wait, preparing for God to lead us into common mission. Whether it be feeding and clothing our neighbors, caring for the sick, reaching out to the lost and forgotten, or offering shelter, this mission is for here and now.

Being God's hands and feet is surely a sign that we are keeping watch, knowing

that time is short and that the needs of those around us grow daily. Let us move forward in common mission with urgency and resolve not to be found sleeping.

Heavenly Father, help us to proclaim the great mystery that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. And though we do not know the hour or the day, help us to remain vigilant in obedience to you as we seek to love you with all our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbors as ourselves. From everlasting to everlasting, Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

Psalm 66:5

THE GREETING

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.* We bless you from the house of the LORD.

Psalm 118:26

THE REFRAIN

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,* and put away your indignation towards us.

Psalm 85:4

A READING

. . . an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: *'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'*

Matthew 1:20-23

THE REFRAIN

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,* and put away your indignation toward us.

Psalm 85:4

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O LORD,* for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me.* Surely God is my salvation;* I will trust, and will not be afraid,* for the LORD God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.* With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name;* make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isaiah 12:1-4

THE REFRAIN

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,* and put away your indignation toward us.

Psalm 85:4

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,* who stand by night in the house of the LORD!* Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the LORD.* May the LORD, maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

Psalm 134

THE REFRAIN

[The righteous] are planted in the house of the LORD;* they flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 92:13

THE HYMN

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem has sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As those of old have sung.
It came a floweret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

German, 15th Century

THE REFRAIN

[The righteous] are planted in the house of the LORD;* they flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 92:13

A READING

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Mark 13:35-37

REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

How passionate the writers of these verses are. Each yearns for God to “rend the heavens” and for Christ to come again in glory. They desperately plead for God to make himself known to the world. Such passion and yearning rarely find their way into our prayers. We often have other plans and other items to check off life’s list before we would desire the real return of Christ and the true establishment of his Kingdom. Though our lives have ups and downs, many of us are not crying out for Christ’s return or anticipating God’s movement in our lives wholeheartedly. We are often too content.

Mark’s warning challenges us to not fall asleep into contentment, but to awaken and “keep watch” for Christ’s presence and work in the world. This Advent season, may we anticipate and desperately hope for Christ’s coming. May we seek to refuse a state of contentment, but, rather, to live lives that require dependence and need as we “eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come behold the works of the LORD;* see what desolations he has brought on earth.

Psalm 46:8

THE GREETING

O my strength, I will watch for you;* for you, O God, are my fortress.

Psalm 59:9

THE REFRAIN

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:11

THE GOSPEL LESSON

And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’

Luke 1:46-55

THE REFRAIN

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:11

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless our God, O peoples;* let the sound of praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living,* and has not let our feet slip.

Psalms 66:8-9

THE REFRAIN

God is faithful;* by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus
Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

THE GOSPEL LESSON

‘But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Mark 13:24-37

THE REFRAIN

God is faithful;* by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus
Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

This text is not exactly the most joyous, Christmas-filled text in the New Testament. At least not on the surface. Starting in verse 24, we're given images of darkness and suffering. Yup, nothing says, "celebrate Jesus and the gift of his life" like darkness and suffering! But, like I said, this is only the surface and just the beginning. Or rather, this is the end. These words are talking about his return, and if ever there will be a time to celebrate, it is at that point. Jesus is explaining to his disciples the sequence of events that will take place when the Son of Man comes and gathers everyone to him. That is truly a time to look forward to and prepare for, as he instructs us to in the next couple of verses. Jesus tells us to be watchful and alert but also to keep on working. He has told us what we are to do after his ascension (go and make disciples of all nations) and we are supposed to do that without becoming lazy and falling asleep.

These verses are extremely encouraging—and also very frightening. We don't know when this will happen. Lots of people have tried to calculate it, and some have truly believed the predictions they made. But there is no clear description of what day, month, and year all of this will happen. So, we keep doing what we are supposed to and maintain a constant state of preparedness.

Jesus will come and gather us to him! Praise God for that amazing news.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 7-13, 2008

Lectionary Texts:

Mark 1:1-8

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Isaiah 40:1-11

2 Peter 3:8-15a

During Advent, the Church remembers with thanksgiving the life and ministry of John the Baptizer, cousin of Our Lord and the promised messenger of his first coming.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in Heaven – hallowed be Thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

“Whoever sings, prays twice.”

~ St. Augustine

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

I will sing of loyalty and of justice;* to you, O LORD, I will sing. *Psalm 101:1*

THE GREETING

Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

Psalm 93:5

THE REFRAIN

This is the Lord's doing;* it is marvelous in our eyes. *Psalm 118:23*

THE PSALM

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people,* to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.* Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,* that his glory may dwell in our land.*

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;* righteousness and peace will kiss each other.* Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.* The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.* Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Psalm 85:8-13

THE REFRAIN

This is the Lord's doing;* it is marvelous in our eyes. *Psalm 118:23*

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Grant us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*✧

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Psalms 51:15

THE REFRAIN

The grass withers, the flower fades;* but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:8

THE GOSPEL LESSON

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1:1-8

THE REFRAIN

The grass withers, the flower fades;* but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:8

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

John the Baptist really blows me away. Here’s a man who knew his calling and went for it—no holds barred. I have a feeling he wasn’t what the people were expecting—with the whole camels’ hair clothing and eating locusts and all. But despite his peculiar appearance and behavior, people came to see him in droves. If it were present day, I imagine it to be like some of the old Billy Graham crusades. They would confess their sins and be baptized right then and there. These people knew of the prophecy and answered the calling to know God more. I admire these peoples’ faith. I have a feeling if I were living back then I would’ve thought John to be a few fries short of a Happy Meal.

Through all of this growing fame, John kept his message constant—pointing everyone away from him and directly to Jesus. He expressed great humility; John knew that Jesus was Lord, not himself, and in that he knew he was unworthy. Verse 8 says, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.” If John the Baptist—the man prophesied to come before Jesus and lead people to prepare the way for him—is unworthy, then I am most certainly unworthy. This is one of those

moments when God brings me back to reality—or as I like to call it, when I get my lunch ate. This is a moment when the Spirit gives me a loving smack in the head to bring me off my prideful high horse and remember that it's simply not about me. It's about Jesus. This is what John's message was all about.

I pray that this message would ring true for you during this Advent season as well as all the year through. It's not about us. It's about Jesus. It's about who he is, what he's done . . . and what he's still doing in us and all around us.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Psaln 32:12

THE GREETING

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,* and I will glorify your name forever.

Psaln 86:12

THE REFRAIN

Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Christ, be merciful to me, a sinner. Father, be merciful to me, a sinner. Spirit be merciful to me, a sinner. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Traditional

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low;* the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.* Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,* for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.' Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'

Isaiah 40:3-5, 9b

THE REFRAIN

Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Christ, be merciful to me, a sinner. Father, be merciful to me, a sinner. Spirit be merciful to me, a sinner. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Traditional

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

Psalm 31:2

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

THE PSALM

LORD, you were favorable to your land;* you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people;* you pardoned all their sin.* . . . Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;* righteousness and peace kiss each other.* . . . Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Psalm 85:1-2, 10-11, 13

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

THE HYMN

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descended, our full homage to demand.

At his feet the six-winged seraph, cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry:
“Alleluia, Alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!”

Liturgy of St. James

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

A READING

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,* plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.* When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD,* and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

THE REFRAIN

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,* and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:7

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Lord God, you who direct our path and order our steps, we confess that too often we do not prepare the way for you to come to the people in our world. Too often we are a part of the apparatus of oppression instead of a voice for justice, a tool of hate instead of an instrument of love, a product of fear rather than a vision of hope. Forgive us and grant us your grace to be made more and more into your likeness. May we be voices that point to Truth, Beauty, Love, and Justice made perfect in You, that we may help prepare others to encounter the Living God. Let our lives be reflections of your character to those around us. And during this season of Advent may we echo the cries of those gone before us and of all those who wait on you: Come, Lord Jesus! *Amen.*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless God in the great congregation,* the LORD, O you who are of Israel's fountain!

Psalms 68:26

THE GREETING

By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,* from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—from mortals whose portion in life is this world.

Psalms 17:13b-14

THE REFRAIN

When God restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Psalms 53:6b

THE NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.* The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you,* not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.* But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,* and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.* Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,* waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.* Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;* and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

2 Peter 3:8-15a

THE REFRAIN

When God restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Psalm 53:6b

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.

Psalm 147:7

A READING

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you,* not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

The normal Advent “stars” are angels and shepherds, foreign dignitaries, a harassed innkeeper, Mary and Joseph, even cows, sheep, and a donkey. But in Mark 1, we encounter part of the Advent story that comes about 30 years too late to fit on a typical Advent calendar. It’s the story of a rather odd character (try eating locusts and wearing goatskin robes and see what people say about you!), Jesus’ cousin John, who went around Palestine calling people out for their misbehaving. Mark clearly identifies John as the “voice crying in the wilderness” spoken of 400+ years earlier by the prophet Isaiah, the one who would prepare people for the arrival of God’s promised Messiah.

Advent is about waiting . . . hoping . . . longing. . . . Humanity had been waiting literally since the Garden of Eden, when John finally came on the scene, announcing, “Repent, turn away from the things that blind you, live ‘rightly.’ Open your eyes, take a look. God is almost here!” The people had waited so long—as many Jews still wait—for the Promised One, the Messiah, for the day when their King would deliver them from their oppressors. They were ripe for something to hope in, and they found it in John’s message.

Some listened. Some turned from darkness into the light. Some chose hope and faith. Some saw God with their own eyes. But others missed Him. For all their longing and hoping and waiting, they just didn’t get it. Or, rather, they chose not to believe that God could look so much like them.

The world today is still full of people who are waiting: for a job, for a spouse, for

a baby, for better health, for a new opportunity—waiting, waiting, waiting. What voice will they hear? What words of hope will be spoken? Who will remind them that God came near in Jesus and stays near through the Spirit? Who will be the ones today who will stand for right-living, justice, hope, and God’s salvation?

Father in Heaven, who are the people in my life who are waiting for something they can't explain, those who are longing for you without knowing it's you they need, those who are hoping to find their way home, never realizing that home isn't a place, it's you. Who are the people in my life who need to hear a voice calling "Here is your God!"? Who are they, God? How will I know them? Will I have the courage to be that voice that speaks words of hope in a world of waiting, hoping, longing people? Please, Lord, give me eyes to see people the way you do and a heart to love the world you love. And may your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. I pray this in the name of the Promised One, Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Rejoice in the LORD, O your righteous,* and give thanks to his holy name!

Psalms 97:12

THE GREETING

Blessed be the LORD, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.* The LORD is my strength and my shield;* in him my heart trusts;* so I am helped, and my heart exults,* and with my song I give thanks to him.

Psalms 28:6-7

THE REFRAIN

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

THE GOSPEL LESSON

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ ”* Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.* Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan,* and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Matthew 3:1-6

THE REFRAIN

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Psalm 95:1

A READING

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." *Mark 1:4-8*

A REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

For Christians, Advent is a season of waiting in anticipation for the gift of our savior, Jesus Christ. But unlike most gifts that typically come as surprises, as we enter the Advent season, we know what we are anticipating. We know the end of the story and as such, the anticipation of Advent is a remembering of this story we have heard countless times.

I always struggle with wanting to read the end of a great book before finishing the entire manuscript, or searching for synopses and reviews of films so I can know what is to come. And when I do indulge, I am filled with regret for spoiling the surprise that comes with finishing off a fantastic story. Why couldn't I just wait? I have certainly learned my lesson in this regard and am careful to avoid finding out the ending of a book or movie prematurely. In doing so, I often find that the conclusion is better than anything I could have imagined and am reminded that it is, indeed, worth the wait.

The anticipation of which John the Baptist speaks holds a surprise ending for his audience. Here is a man who already commands respect from followers who

flock to him to be baptized. In the midst of performing this most meaningful of sacraments, he declares that there is someone greater soon to come, more powerful than him who will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit. We, of course, know that John the Baptist's prophetic words signal the coming of Jesus Christ. But what did these words mean to those listening at the time? Did they know the immensity of this prediction, and the profound significance it would hold for the world? Did they have any sense what it meant to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? I wonder how these followers were not begging John the Baptist to tell them more—to turn to the last page of the book and disclose the ending of the story. And yet they waited in anticipation and were no doubt surprised by the wonderful gift of which he spoke.

As we anticipate this Advent season, I wonder if we truly do so with a sense of excitement—as these people did—or if it simply becomes another routine of the season. And as I think about the routine and perhaps apathy of this process, my sense is that it stems from the ending of this great story somehow being spoiled. We know what we anticipate because we go through the cycle each year as the days grow shorter and colder (to me, physical reminders of the Advent season). There is no surprise at the end because we have turned to the last page countless times. We know the story backward and forward, and the ending is one we can easily recite over and over.

Of course, we cannot simply forget the end of the story, nor should we attempt to. But we can reflect on its significance in a way that seeks to step out of routine and apathy. Receiving a gift is a wonderful feeling, especially when it is a surprise greater than one you could imagine. Is this how we view the birth of Jesus Christ, even as we know of the saving grace that comes with his eventual death and resurrection? This is beyond doubt the most wonderful of gifts—one that is undeserved and yet given through love.

As we anticipate the coming of Jesus this season, may we do so with a renewed sense of excitement and joy that comes with waiting for an immense surprise. As we remember, may we step out of routine and think about what it felt like to experience God's love for the first time. And as we celebrate in joy at the end of the story, may we do so acknowledging that the gift of God's love and grace given through Jesus is greater than we could ever imagine.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. *Psalm 96:9*

THE GREETING

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances. *Psalm 119:164*

THE REFRAIN

May integrity and uprightness preserve me,* for I wait for you. *Psalm 25:21*

THE PSALM

Do not fret because of the wicked;* do not be envious of wrongdoers,* for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.* Trust in the LORD, and do good;* so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.* Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Commit your way to the LORD;* trust in him, and he will act.* He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.* Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;* do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. *Psalm 37:1-7*

THE REFRAIN

May integrity and uprightness preserve me,* for I wait for you. *Psalm 25:21*

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, grant me your peace.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,* and all your faithful shall bless you.* They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,* to make known to all people your mighty deeds,* and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. *Psalm 145:10-12*

A READING

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ ”

Matthew 3:1-3

THE SMALL VERSE

The earth is the Lord’s and all the fullness thereof,* the world and we who dwell within. Thanks be to God!

Traditional

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

A few years ago my husband and I traveled to Norway with his family. One of the places we stayed for a few days was the very place that the King, Queen, and Prince of Norway were coming to visit also. We arrived the day before they did, but we got to see the preparations and anticipation for the arriving royal family. Buildings had been cleaned and repaired. The landscape around the city had been spruced up. The hotel where they would be staying had made some major improvements. The city was cleaned and shined. Everyone was so excited for the King and Queen to come. They wanted everything to be special and went out of their way to make sure it was. The day they arrived was truly an eventful one. We made our way down to the port to see their boat arrive. People lined the streets, various performances were put on by locals, and the royal family was greeted with applause and cheers. The King had arrived! I felt like Zacchaeus as I watched from a tree so I could see. As I read through the passage in Mark, I couldn’t help but think about this experience I had in Norway. The preparation and anticipation for the coming king. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord. All his work was done to prepare. What are we doing to prepare the way for our coming king? What preparations are we making to welcome him and prepare the path for him? During this time of Advent we anticipate our coming Lord. So often we find that Christmas is all of the sudden here without taking the time to prepare. This Advent take time to prepare your hearts and your lives for the coming Lord. Just as this city in Norway went to great length to welcome their king, queen, and prince, we should do so also. It is our Lord who is coming.

Lord, just as John the Baptist prepared the way for your coming, might we prepare our hearts for this Advent season. Help us to quiet our hearts and reflect on our lives to make room for you. We ask for your help to keep us focused on the true meaning of this holiday season. You came to be with us. Be in our preparations. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Worship the LORD with gladness;* come into his presence with singing. *Psalm 100:2*

THE GREETING

Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!* O LORD, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.* We bless you from the house of the LORD.* The LORD is God, and he has given us light.* Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. *Psalm 118:25-27*

THE REFRAIN

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. *2 Peter 3:13*

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.* Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,* that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;* the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

"Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,* and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?*" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.* The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;* surely the people are grass.* The grass withers, the flower fades;* but the word of our God will stand forever.* Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;* lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings* lift it up, do not fear;* say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"* See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;* his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.* He will feed his flock like a shepherd;* he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom,* and gently lead the mother sheep. *Isaiah 40:1-11*

THE REFRAIN

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. *2 Peter 3:13*

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O taste and see that the LORD is good;* happy are those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 34:8

THE HYMN

The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks;
When beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.
Not, as of old, a little child, to bear, and fight, and die,
But crowned with glory like the sun that lights the morning sky.
The King shall come when morning dawns and earth's dark night is past;
O haste the rising of that morn, the day that shall ever last;
And let the endless bliss begin, by weary saints foretold,
When right shall triumph over wrong, and truth shall be extolled.
The King shall come when morning dawns and light and beauty brings:
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray, come quickly, King of Kings.

Greek

A READING

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;* the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

“Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,* and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:3-5

A REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

John the Baptist was sent to “prepare the way for the Lord.” People previously scattered all over Judea came to hear John, who stood by the Jordan River urging them to confess their sins. The crowds confessed and John baptized them, symbolically cleansing them of their sins. Gathered around the Jordan the community was preparing itself for the one who was to come after John.

In what way are we going to prepare for the coming of the Lord? While we are not going down to the river, this is a time for us to confess our sins and seek forgiveness. It is a time for us to live into our baptism, which marks us as one

body and disciples of one Lord.

December is a month filled with preparation. We prepare for events, family, gift giving, and travel. The more our preparation scatters us, the more difficult it becomes to prepare for the coming Christ. This is our challenge for Advent. Wendell Berry's final poem in *A Timbered Choir* says,

There is a day
When the road neither
Comes nor goes, and the way
is not a way but a place.

The way to move forward is tied to the place we are in. Preparing ourselves as individuals and as a community for the one who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit" will be difficult if we live scattered lives during the whole Advent season. The encouragement for us is to find a place that is not characterized by the hectic but by the possibility that we will be able to hear John's exhortation in our own lives, "Make straight the way for the Lord."

THE CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

May God himself order my days and make them acceptable in his sight. Blessed is the Lord always, my strength and my redeemer. Amen. ✠

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless the LORD, O you his angels,* you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.* Bless the LORD, all his hosts,* his ministers that do his will.* Bless the LORD, all his works,* in all the places of his dominion.* Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Psalm 103:20-22

THE GREETING

As a deer longs for flowing streams,* so my soul longs for you, O God.

Psalm 42:1

THE REFRAIN

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.* This is the Lord's doing;* it is marvelous in our eyes.

Psalm 118:22-23

THE GOSPEL LESSON

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor;' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to

raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Luke 3:2b-3, 7-18

THE REFRAIN

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.* This is the Lord's doing;* it is marvelous in our eyes.

Psalms 118:22-23

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O come, let us sing to the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!* Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;* let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!* For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. *Psalms 95:1-3*

THE HYMN

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God the Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
who were, and are, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hides Thee,
though the eye of sinful man Your glory may not see;
Only You are holy; there is none beside Thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Your works shall praise Your name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber

THE SMALL VERSE

Into your hands I commend my spirit for you have redeemed me, O God of my life. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the comforting Spirit. *Traditional*

A REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Where do we look for God?

Do we seek him out in the pages of *Christianity Today*, the lyrics of Michael W. Smith, or in the sermons of a mega-church pastor? Do we find him in the halls of government or at the mall? If we look in Scripture, we find him in an odd place: the desert.

And in this chapter of Mark, we don't find him speaking through a burning bush or even a crowd on fire. As Isaiah predicted, it is the voice of one calling out in the desert. And it isn't one extremely charismatic guy with a great three-point sermon. It's a freak telling us to repent.

John the Baptizer was a camel hair-wearing, locust-eating, honey-dripping freak. Of all the people God could choose to prepare the way for his son, the Messiah, he selects a man more likely to offend than charm. What does that mean for us? Where are we open to hearing God's voice? Are we willing to hear a message from the margins delivered by a person who doesn't fit in with the majority view—a homeless woman on the El, a gay man in our office? Equally important, are we—as individuals and as a church—willing to be on the margins, out of step with the majority? Are we okay with being a little freaky in our modern post-modern context? And what does that look like?

We, as the church, are called to help “prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him.” Taking a route similar to that of the Baptizer may seem a little

risky, challenging, and yes, nuts. But rather than try to tame this wild man, we should go back to the Scripture and read what happened: Psalm 85 says that “righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.” Mark goes on to tell us that “the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out” to see John. And regardless of their original motives for heading out to the desert, they didn’t ended up stoning him on sight. They confessed their sins and were baptized. They were transformed.

It wasn’t a Pharisee or a Sadducee who led crowds of people to confess. While they clung to every rule and judged those who didn’t measure up, it was a freak on the margins who baptized with water and spoke of the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The outsider was the one bringing people into the Kingdom of God.

And so today, may our prayers be centered around asking God to gives us his wisdom to understand how we can help prepare the way and his eyes to see those unexpected prophets to help us on this journey.

THE CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O God, the source of eternal light: Shed forth your unending day upon all of us who watch for you, that our lips may praise you, our lives may bless you, and our worship my give you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 14-20, 2008

Lectionary Texts:

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Psalm 126

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*During Advent, the Church remembers with thanksgiving
the life and ministry of John the Baptizer, cousin of Our Lord
and the promised messenger of His first coming.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in Heaven – hallowed be Thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

“Whoever sings, prays twice.”

~ St. Augustine

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!* I will praise the LORD as long as I live;* I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Psalms 146:1-2

THE GREETING

Not to us, O LORD,* not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Psalms 115:1

THE REFRAIN

The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Psalms 126:3

THE NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

Rejoice always,* pray without ceasing,* give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Do not quench the Spirit.* Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good;* abstain from every form of evil.* May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

THE REFRAIN

The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Psalms 126:3

THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory now and forever. *Amen.*✠

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD!* Praise the LORD from the heavens;* praise him from the heights!

Psalms 148:1

THE REFRAIN

Return, O my soul, to your rest,* for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

Psalms 116:7

THE PSALM

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;* my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.* So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.* Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.* So I will bless you as long as I live;* I will lift up my hands and call on your name.* My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help,* and in the shadow of your wings I sing for you.

Psalms 63:1-7

THE REFRAIN

Return, O my soul, to your rest,* for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

Psalms 116:7

A READING

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

John 1:19-22

THE REFRAIN

Return, O my soul, to your rest,* for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

Psalms 116:7

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

When Alexander Papaderos was a boy living in poverty in a Nazi-occupied country, he would play with a small piece of a broken mirror he found on the road. The game was to reflect light into dark, inaccessible places where the sun would never shine -- holes, crevices, closets. As he grew up, he kept the piece of mirror in his wallet. In idle moments, he would slip the mirror out of his pocket and continue the game. He began to see his game as a metaphor for his purpose in life. That he was not the Light, nor the source of Light. That the Light existed, and it would only shine in many dark places if he reflected it. Papaderos knew what John knew. That his life was not about him -- his ego, his desires. John knew that he was not to absorb the Light that shone on him through Christ, nor merely to bask in it. He was to reflect it onto others and into dark places so that others might know Him.

God our Father, we thank you for the Light of your love, understanding and salvation. We are fragments of a mirror whose whole design and shape only you know. Help us to reflect this love and understanding into the dark places of this world. Help us to be like the Moon which reflects the light of the Sun through shadows of night so that others may find their way out of the darkness and feel hope. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless the LORD, O you his angels,* you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.* Bless the LORD, all his hosts,* his ministers that do his will.* Bless the LORD, all his works,* in all the places of his dominion.* Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Psalms 103:20-22

THE GREETING

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. Amen.

Traditional

THE REFRAIN

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,* O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalms 19:14

THE GOSPEL LESSON

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 into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.* What has come into being in him was life,* and the life was the light of all people.* The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.* He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.* The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ... He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said.

John 1:1-9, 23

THE REFRAIN

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,* O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalms 19:14

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Let us praise the Lord, whom the Angels are praising, whom the Cherubim and Seraphim proclaim: Holy, holy, holy!

The Short Breviary

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.* From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised. *Psalm 113:2-3*

THE SHORT VERSE

Give ear to my prayer, O God;* do not hide yourself from my supplication.*
Attend to me, and answer me...

Psalm 55:1-2a

THE HYMN

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow;
Every tongue confess him King of glory now
'Tis the Father's pleasure, we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

In your hearts enthrone him; there, let him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true;
May your voice entreat him in temptation's hour;
Let his will enfold you in its light and power.

Brothers, this Lord Jesus shall return again,
With his Father's glory, o'er the earth to reign;
He is God the Savior; He is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshipped, always blessed, adored.

C. Noel

THE REFRAIN

Give ear to my prayer, O God;* do not hide yourself from my supplication.*
Attend to me, and answer me...

Psalm 55:1-2a

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

"I am the voice of the one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

This is the action verse in gospel lesson for this week. It's not the only thing of note, after all, John the Baptist was faced with a problem I certainly don't face everyday - having to convince others that he was in fact NOT the savior. But verse 23 is where John - through the words of Isaiah - gets down to business. First he evokes an image of a desert. It's a commonly used analogy for desolation, isolation, and desperation - humanity without the grace of God through Jesus.

The image is striking.

You've probably heard a slightly different interpretation of the second half, urging the listener to "*prepare* the way of the Lord." There's an implication of mystery associated with the word *prepare*. We can't be sure of what the future holds, and the best we can do is to prepare for anything. God's plan and wisdom are beyond our wildest expectations, and we should let the mystery and majesty of this season pervade all our actions and interactions, even as we shove our way through the malls and airports. Take some time now, to prepare your heart and spirit to remain in a state of awe and worship throughout what can at times be a very stressful and distracting season.

Lord, thank you for providing relief in the desert through your son, Jesus. Help me to prepare my heart and mind to fully appreciate the meaning of the birth, life and death of our savior. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Psalm 95:1

THE REFRAIN

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;* with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 89:1

THE GREETING

My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you;* my soul, also, which you have rescued.

Psalm 71:23

THE REFRAIN

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;* with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 89:1

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; To provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; They shall repair the ruined

cities, the devastations of many generations.

Isaiah 61:1-4

THE REFRAIN

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;* with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

Psalms 89:1

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us,* and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.*
Praise the LORD!

Psalms 117

THE REQUEST FOR THE LORD'S PRESENCE

Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains so they smoke.

Psalms 144:5

THE PSALM

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.
Happy are those who make the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods.
You have multiplied, O LORD my God, you wondrous deeds
and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.
Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

Psalms 40:1-6

THE SMALL VERSE

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. *Psalms 145:1*

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

John was a faithful witness to Christ. Not seeking to be the main event, he prepared Jesus' way by directing attention away from himself and pointing it to Jesus. In this way John fulfilled Isaiah's words, making straight the way of the Lord. May we follow John in being such transparent witnesses, and may we follow Christ in his Messianic path of death and resurrection, made straight by John and all the prophets, apostles, and saints.

Holy and faithful God, we thank you for John's witness that prepared the path for your coming. We thank you for the great cloud of witnesses—for all who have made straight your path to us, that you might take up residence among us even today. We pray that our own lives would add to this one testimony strung through time; make us faithful witnesses to your light. And, seeking to make straight your way, may we then walk in it, following you on your path to the cross, knowing it to be the path of light, joy, and resurrected life.

THE CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Save me, O Lord, while I am awake and keep me while I sleep, that I may wake in Christ and rest in peace.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Psalm 145:21

THE GREETING

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

Psalm 36:5

THE REFRAIN

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous...

Psalm 1:6a

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

For I the LORD love justice,* I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense,* and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.* Their descendents shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples;* all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.* I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,* my whole being shall exult in my God;* for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,* he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom deck himself with a garland,* and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.* For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to

spring up,* so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:8-11

THE REFRAIN

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous...

Psalms 1:6a

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, grant me your peace.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Psalms 103:1

THE REFRAIN

Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways.

Psalms 128:1

THE GOSPEL LESSON

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.* He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.* This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."* And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

John 1:6-8, 19-23

THE REFRAIN

Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways.

Psalms 128:1

THE PSALM

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.* Who is the King of Glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.* Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.* Who is the King of glory?*

The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Psalms 24:7-10

THE REFRAIN

Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways.

Psalms 128:1

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

In many ways the life of John the Baptist seems to be characterized by failure. John is a bit of a social outcast living in the desert, his life's work is ridiculed by the authorities. Ultimately John is unjustly imprisoned and beheaded because of what God commanded him to speak.

Yet John the Baptist is a model for all who wish to follow Jesus. This is because John realized that his life's purpose was not to be successful in the world's eyes or to further his own personal influence but instead he simply lived to point people to Jesus. John was able to draw large crowds to hear his sermons and receive the baptism that he offered. Yet, all the while John preaches that he is only the prelude to prepare people for the main event that is to come. At the height of his success John is able to joyfully say to the crowds in speaking of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

May we not be seduced by lesser pursuits and give ourselves to what is worthless, but let us live to take our place in the work of God. May we also not become confused as to who we are promoting be it ourselves, our churches, or organizations, but let us live to point others to the only person worth living for, Jesus Christ.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Psalms 51:15

THE GREETING

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations.* Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world,* from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalms 90:1-2

THE REFRAIN

But test everything; hold fast to what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

THE PSALM

All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.*
Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.*
He turned the sea into dry land;* they passed through the river on foot.* There
we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might forever,* whose eyes keep watch on
the nations—let the rebellious not exalt themselves.* Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard.

Psalm 66:4-8

THE REFRAIN

But test everything; hold fast to what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

THE GOSPEL LESSON

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* As it is written
in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will
prepare your way;* the voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of
the Lord, make his paths straight”’,* John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:1-4

THE REFRAIN

But test everything; hold fast to what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Be, Lord, my helper and forsake me not. Do not despise me, O God, my savior.

The Short Breviary

THE LORD’S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this
new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be
overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose,
through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to
him with songs of praise!

Psalm 95:2

THE REQUEST FOR THE LORD’S PRESENCE

Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion
come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.* Help us, o God of our

salvation, for the glory of your name;* deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake.

Psalms 79:8-9

THE HYMN

There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

There's a tumult of joy over the wonderful birth,
For the Virgin's sweet boy is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! The star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

In the light of that star lie the ages imperaled;
And that song from afar has swept over the world.
Every hearth is aflame, and the beautiful sing
And we greet in His cradle our Savior the king!

Josiah Holland

A READING

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned. And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, has not been idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:1-3

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

O Lord, you were born in a stable, you were crucified on a cross, you were buried in a tomb. You rose from the dead, walked again on the earth, and ascended into heaven. You sit at the right hand of the Father. And in your glory Lord, you will come again. But in and through the distractions of the world around us, it can be hard to remember you will someday return to this earth. Help us to be expectant of that day. Let us not fall asleep, nor find satisfaction in anything less than you and the hope you offer. Give us the strength and will to do your work. Let your kingdom come, O Lord. *Amen.*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

But I call upon God, and the LORD will save me.* Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan,* and he will hear my voice.* He will redeem me unharmed from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.* God, who is enthroned from of old, will hear, and will humble them.

THE GREETING

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.* We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

Psalm 65:4

THE REFRAIN

Our soul waits for the LORD;* he is our help and shield.

Psalm 33:20

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you said about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

John 1:22-28

THE REFRAIN

Our soul waits for the LORD;* he is our help and shield.

Psalm 33:20

THE PSALM

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;* I shall not be shaken.* On God rests my deliverance and my honor;* my might rock, my refuge is in God.* Trust in him at all times, O people;* pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62:6-8

THE REFRAIN

Our soul waits for the LORD;* he is our help and shield.

Psalm 33:20

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

O God, come to my assistance! O Lord, make haste to help me!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,* so I shall be saved from my enemies.

Psalm 18:3

A READING

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.*
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;*
then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

Palm 126:1-2

THE HYMN

Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater Son!
Hail in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong;
To help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls condemned and dying, are precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth;
Love, joy, and hope like flowers, spring in his path to birth.
Before him, on the mountains, shall peace, the herald go,
And righteousness, in fountains, from hill and valley flow.

To him shall prayer unceasing and daily vows ascent;
His kingdom still increasing, a kingdom without end.
The tide of time shall never his covenant remove;
His name shall stand forever; that name to us is love.

James Montgomery

A READING

The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.* Restore our fortunes,
O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.* May those who sow in tears reap
with shouts of joy.* Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall
come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Palm 126:3-6

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Father of lights, come into our shadows—into the darknesses we willfully hide
and those that aren’t yet obvious to us. Thank you that our work is not to shine,
but to be witnesses to and conduits of your light. Illuminate the paths we travel.
Shine within us on our way. Be reflected in our conversations, our relationships,
and our neighborhoods as we watch for your coming. *Amen.*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

Psalm 34:3

THE GREETING

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples;* I will sing praises to you among the nations.* For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;* your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

Psalm 57:9-10

THE REFRAIN

Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die.

Psalm 79:11

THE SMALL VERSE

Our soul waits for the LORD;* he is our help and shield.

Psalm 33:20

THE REFRAIN

Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die.

Psalm 79:11

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:67-79

THE REFRAIN

Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die.

Psalm 79:11

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

O God, come to my assistance! O Lord, make haste to help me!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

O God, the source of eternal light: Shed forth your unending day upon all of us who watch for you, that our lips may praise you, our lives may bless you, and our worship may give you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come, behold the works of the LORD.

Psalms 46:8a

A READING, PRAYER & REFLECTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Father: as we remember Your Saint and beloved John open our hearts to not only read, but to understand; to not only see, but have vision; to not only hear, but listen to the voice in the wilderness, the voice of the one who was spoke through You. Still our hearts.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

As John was sent by You so You send us. Guide our steps, give us courage, fill our mouths with your words. Pinch us lest we forget that this divine sending is anything less than from You.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he can to testify to the light

Thwart our attempts to be a light that heals our world from the darkness. Remind us that You are the Light; we are witnesses called to testify to Your glory. May the people we see on the bus, the train, at work, in line to buy a sandwich or coffee—may they see the Light. Guard us so that at the very most we are witnesses to Light, and at the very least we are not obstacles in the paths of others seeing the Light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the prophet?"

He answered, "No."

Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself?"

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are either the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals."

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Who are you?

Father, forgive us. Forgive us all for forgetting who this man is, the man who came baptizing. Forgive us for forgetting the miracle of his birth to the ancient Zachariah and barren Elizabeth. And forgive us for forgetting the miracle of Your birth. Forgive us for seeing the Light and being too afraid to stretch our hands towards it. Forgive us for being too concerned with wealth whether the house is clean—too concerned to bathe in Your river of grace.

Who are you?

They asked John this question. They still ask us this question. It is asked about us. It is asked about You.

And we ask this same question about John. Did You really ask him to do such strange things and to die? And we tremble because, Lord, if You asked him to do that, You might just be calling us to do the same thing.

We silently ask this question to the man on the street corner, yelling into his megaphone, "Hell is coming, are you ready?" We ask because we're ashamed of this fellow Christian, and because we ourselves are ashamed to proclaim your salvation and justice to the world as boldly as he.

Lord, we even ask this same question of ourselves. When we catch ourselves averting our eyes from the homeless, or when our ears are so filled with our own grievances we cannot hear the cry of our friend, or when we fail to offer a word of assurance to a stranger.

And to our shame, perhaps our biggest shame, this is the question we ask Jesus

when we are in the boat and the anchor isn't holding and the waves are bigger than we've ever imagined.

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.

Father, thank You for the answer to us over and over again when we question who we are. Thank You for our brother John. Thank You that the voice that once cried in the wilderness still rings wildly in our souls. Thank You that just as your servant John spoke through the Spirit, Your servants still speak through the Spirit, and that the Spirit still speaks.

The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Abba, to You and You alone be all praise and honor and glory. Thank you for the audacious proclamation. This is the binding thread of Advent. This is why we cry from our gut, "O Come Emmanuel!" —because Emmanuel who *came* is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Emmanuel who *is* takes away the sin of the world. And Emmanuel who *comes* is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Abba, Father, Savior, Redeemer, Prince of Peace, Alpha, Omega, the One who is our very breath—

in a world that seems to grow darker with each day,

in our own world where the darkness fights your hope in the battle for our heart,

in our nation that needs you more than a bail-out plan, a healthcare plan or any other plan,

in our families wrecked with cancer of both the body and soul

—in this world, we cry with everything in us, "Come. Come!" Give us the courage to point boldly to Christmas, to Easter, to You and declare, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Lift our hearts as we lift them to You. Rekindle flames in our burnt out hearts as we are aching for Your Advent. Light of Light, remind us of Your divine call on our lives—because You call and send us to places that will steal our breath and make us rely wholly on You. **Remind us not only who John was, but who we are, and in the midst of the storm surrounding this Christmas, remind us of who you are: the Lamb, who will take away the sin of humanity by giving humanity everything.**

Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, so is now, so shall ever be, world without end. Alleluia, Amen.

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT
& FIRST WEEK OF CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 21-27, 2008

Lectionary Texts:

Luke 1:26-38

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26

Romans 16:25-27

During the fourth and final week of Advent, the Church is mindful in particular of the life and role of St. Joseph, husband of the Virgin and earthly father of our Lord.

St. Stephen, who was one of the first class of seven deacons appointed by the Apostles in Jerusalem, was also the first Christian martyr. Because of his testimony as the first to die for the faith of Christ, the Church observes his feast day immediately after that which celebrates the birth of Stephen's Lord.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in Heaven – hallowed be Thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

“Whoever sings, prays twice.”

~ St. Augustine

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.* Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.* For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

Psalms 96:2-4

REQUEST FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Psalms 90:14

THE GREETING

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,* according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed,* and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles,* according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith*—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!

Romans 16:25-27

THE REFRAIN

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous...

Psalms 1:6a

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

THE REFRAIN

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous...

Psalms 1:6a

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Purify my conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find me a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* ✧

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Psalm 103:1

THE PSALM

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.* Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.* From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.* The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. *Psalm 119:1-4*

THE SMALL VERSE

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

The angel of the Lord comes to Mary with an indecent proposal. Indecent not just because it will require Mary to sacrifice her good social standing, but also because it is such a distasteful way for a deity to act. God, we think, ought to be the biggest, strongest being on the block—indeed, a “Supreme Being,” absolved from all the conditions and limitations of our kind of life: pain, suffering, endurance, volatility, vulnerability. We imagine a coercive, forceful God, able (and inclined) to say “No” to us at every point. How telling it is that we often imagine the ideal existence as unlimited power, unrestrained choice, complete detachment (“Getting whatever *I* want”).

I submit that God is nothing like that. We expect the “annunciation” of God’s plan to be a cosmic-sized, “Here’s how it is.” But God’s decisive victory depends on the consent of a poor, backwoods virgin, for her conversation with Gabriel is not over until she utters, “Let it be with me according to your word.” That is, God’s power is God’s choice to be with us, and for us. And if God is to say an unconditional “Yes” to us, that means vulnerability, *even asking our permission to save us*, for he created us free to love and receive love, or not. Our God is the

kind of God whose “Yes” waits on each of our own “yes’s”, and is exposed to the possibility of rejection in our “no’s”. That possibility was realized on the Cross, the ultimate sign that God will not take from us by force what he would have freely offered: our wills, our lives, our love.

Mary gives us hope with her “yes.” The “power of the Most High” truly does overshadow her, but in doing so makes her more truly herself. That power enables her mission, her identity, her salvation, in ways she could never do on her own. As we are created in the image of *this* God, we are called to imitate his vulnerable love with “yes’s” that reach across the boundaries of religious and social difference, that expose us to the real danger of identifying ourselves with others, that attend to the seemingly endless needs of those who are disempowered. In other words, a “yes” beyond guarantees and control. We can only do this because God saw fit to become one of us, and because Mary responded with loving consent.

We love because God first loved us. Let it be with us, individually and corporately, according to that word.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Love the LORD, all you his saints.* The LORD preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.* Be strong, and let your heart take courage,* all you who wait for the LORD.

Psalm 31:23-24

THE GREETING

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.

THE REFRAIN

Say among the nations, “The LORD is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved,* He will judge the peoples with equity.”

Psalm 96:10

THE PSALM

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;* with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.* I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;* your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.* You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:* ‘I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.’”¹ Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: “I have set the crown on one who is mighty,* I have exalted one chosen from the people.* I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him;* my hand shall always

remain with him;* my arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him.* I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.* My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted.* I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.* He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26

THE REFRAIN

Say among the nations, “The LORD is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved,* He will judge the peoples with equity.”

Psalms 96:10

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD’S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Psalms 51:15

THE PSALM

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.* Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.* From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.* The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

Psalms 119:1-4

THE SMALL VERSE

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

It’s a fact of human existence that we spend a lot of our time formulating expectations about how we believe our lives will go. As children we dream about what it will be like to be an adult—planning hypothetical weddings or mapping out potential career ambitions. As teenagers we imagine our lives with full independence, yearning with all kinds of adolescent angst for the day when our parents will no longer have the final say over who we’re becoming. As adults

our expectations perhaps become even more complicated, as we envision how particular relationships will go, map out what we will be doing six months from now, or dictate how we think God should be at work in our lives. We are forever forming expectations (seriously, think about some you may have right now without even realizing it!), and therefore find ourselves in a somewhat endless cycle where those plans are either fulfilled or shattered. Looking toward the future is certainly not a bad thing, but are we doing so with a sense of openness to God?

The season of Advent speaks toward this idea of expectations and how we handle them. In Luke 1:26-38 we receive the very first birth announcement of the coming Messiah—delivered not by way of an embossed postcard in the mail, but through a face-to-face encounter with an angelic messenger. And with the words of Gabriel, we see the shattering of a great deal of expectations. In the Old Testament God makes a promise to Israel that the throne of David will be eternally filled (2 Samuel 7:1-16). From these words were developed the Jewish understanding of the coming Messiah. For this small and often oppressed nation, the dreams and expectations of such a Savior filled their minds with all types of assumptions of what their impending King would be like. Imagine the anticipation they must have felt, coupled with a hopeful yearning, continually wondering if theirs would be the generation to see the induction of the triumphal kingdom that so many had longed for.

The intervention of God's deliverance into human history in the very fullness of time wrecked every expectation the Jewish people had about Messiah, because true to His nature, God shows up in ways beyond what any human could have planned. Through Gabriel we learn of a Messiah coming not through a grand triumph of power, but as an infant—the child of everyday people. It was not the way that the Jews expected to experience deliverance, but perfectly reflected the humility of God's character and His desire to be in relationship with us in choosing to come among His people in the flesh. This birth announcement changed everything about the way the Jews envisioned their future, and in so doing, the whole world is ushered into God's promise of redemption.

On a much smaller level, we see Mary similarly dealing with her own set of expectations. In choosing to obediently submit to the will of her sovereign God, Mary let go of whatever dreams and desires she had for her own young life. We can imagine what sort of existence she envisioned having with Joseph, and yet at a mere word from on high she yields all that she is to the role that has been chosen for her.

As we progress through these last few days before we celebrate the coming of Christ, let's be challenged to let go of our own expectations of the Messiah. And similarly to Mary, might we not ask ourselves if we would submit the control of even the smallest expectations of our life to the will of our Creator? Are we living with a sense of openness to God in our lives, giving Him the space to do His work?

Let us rejoice in this Advent season in a God who shatters all expectations in our lives, sending a Savior who would be more than a political leader, but the redeemer of our souls. And let us choose in submission to yield all of ourselves to Him, walking in the footsteps of Mary as people of God who are daily surrendering our expectations to the very one who wrote the story.

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

Psalm 66:16

THE GREETING

May God be gracious to us and bless us* and make his face to shine upon us,* that all your way may be known upon earth,* your saving power among all nations.

Psalm 67:1-2

THE REFRAIN

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;* your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Psalm 89:2

THE GOSPEL LESSON

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

THE REFRAIN

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;* your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Psalm 89:2

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly hosts; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. *Doxology*

A READING

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:23-24

THE HYMN

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Savior of the nations come; | Not by human flesh and blood; |
| Virgin's Son, here make your home! | By the Spirit of our God |
| Marvel now, O heaven and earth, | Was the word of God made flesh, |
| That the Lord chose such a birth. | Woman's offspring, pure and fresh. |

Martin Luther

THE SMALL VERSE

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,* who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. *Psalm 72:18-19*

A PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Covenant Hymnal

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2008

THE EVE OF THE NATIVITY

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

Psalms 57:8

REQUEST FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, grant me your peace.

THE GREETING

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the Glory of God the Father. ✠

THE REFRAIN

Blessed by the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

Luke 1:68

THE PSALM

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord
glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and
come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall
never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity."

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all
that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the
forest sing for joy

before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will
judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Psalms 96

THE REFRAIN

Blessed by the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

Luke 1:68

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Purify my conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find me a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* ✧

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalms 107:1

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:2-7

THE HYMN

Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, Holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at they birth.
Jesus, Lord, at they birth.

Joseph Mohr

A READING

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

“Do not be afraid: for see—I am bringing you news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior. . . . Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

There are few more important or cogent messages these days than the command given the shepherds by the angels: “Do not be afraid.” They continued by saying they had good news. This good news entailed the very peace of God. Fear has become of us the veritable coin of the realm. We trade our fears like children swap secrets. They are like viruses that remain dormant within us only to spring to virulent life. We are fevered with fears these days. I considered the national fears I have experienced throughout my life. My first real remembered fear was of the Russians and the bomb. I remember my mother talking about how to make our small brick home into a fallout shelter. I even remember visiting models of underground fallout shelters at the Tennessee State Fair. I remember the Cuban missile crisis and the expectation that at any moment we would be blown up. I was in high school at the height of the Vietnam War. I remember the fear of being drafted. I remember fearing for friends who went off to war and mourning for some who never came home. I remember the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King and, finally, Robert Kennedy. I remember wondering if the world was coming apart. What would my life look like? Would

we even survive the 60s? I remember gas shortages in the 70s, the Watergate scandals, and “stagflation.” Would democracy hold? I could go on, of course. The crises continued, the fearful challenges continued to mount. Behind all these external fears Americans lived with the fear of economic collapse. They feared that they would not be able to live up to the standards of their parents. After 9/11 we faced new fears—dirty bombs, anthrax, hidden terrorists. Many of us came to fear our own government. But now our fears are mounting: a collapsing economy, rising unemployment, wars in two countries, looming environmental disaster. Some place their hopes in our new president. Others fear him as well.

Have we ever needed these words more? Fear not. Good news. God’s peace. These were not empty words. They did not even mean there was no suffering and difficulty ahead, because surely there would be. But the arc of God’s purpose is peace. The foundation of God’s intention is salvation. The basis of God’s activity is hope. Jesus wrapped in his mother’s love was destined to a cross—and a resurrection. And so are we—his cross, our resurrection. So once again hear these words:

“Do not be afraid: for see—I am bringing you news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior. . . . Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2008
THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Psalm 32:11

THE GREETING

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;* with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.* I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;* your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Psalm 89:1-2

THE REFRAIN

“Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me...”

Psalm 40:7

THE GOSPEL LESSON

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was

expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” 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. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20

THE REFRAIN

“Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me...”

Psalms 40:7

THE GLORIA

Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.* As it was in the beginning, so it is now and so it shall ever be, world without end.* Alleluia.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a pure virgin: Grant that I, who have been born again and made your child by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through my Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. *Amen.* ✧

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✧

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

Psalm 96:1-3

REQUEST FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. *Psalm 57:5*

THE GREETING

With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.* For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Psalm 54:6-7

THE PSALM

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.* The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.* I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.* I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;* my body also rests secure.

Psalm 16:5-9

A READING

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,* according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed,* and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith*—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!

Romans 16:25-27

THE HYMN

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Joy to the world! The Lord is come: | Joy to the world! The Savior reigns; |
| Let earth receive her King; | Let all their songs employ, |
| Let every heart prepare him room, | While fields and floods, rocks, hills, |
| And heaven and nature sing, | and plains |
| And heaven and nature sing, | Repeat the sounding joy, |
| And heaven and nature sing. | Repeat the sounding joy, |
| | Repeat the sounding joy. |

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing.

Isaac Watts

A REFLECTION & PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Today we take a step back from the busyness of the season, from the parties, from the shopping, from our families and our friends and we take a moment to pause at the manger. We take a moment to allow the reality that God came in human form to soak into the center of our being. For in the stillness of the night the one who will save the world from their sins is born. No longer will those who dwell in darkness be in the dark, because a great light has broken into the world.

So we pause at the manger. We pause, even though we know the rest of the story. We know that the manger is now empty. We know that this innocent, vulnerable child grew up and turned the world upside down. But today, we pause at the manger, and re-read the story. Because in reading the story, we are reminded that the God who so often seems so distant has come to us in the form of a vulnerable child and experienced the brokenness of our world and the messiness of our lives. Through the life of this child God has experienced the joy of weddings and the grief of loss, the comfort of friendship and the reality of loneliness.

Take a moment. Still yourself in the presence of God, and allow it to soak in. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And it is in this infant child that we find our hope! *Amen.*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2008 THE FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!* I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Psalms 146:1-2

THE GREETING

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Psalms 115:1

THE REFRAIN

...the decrees of the LORD are sure, making the wise simple...

Psalms 19:7b

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Acts 6:8-15, 7:54-60

THE REFRAIN

...the decrees of the LORD are sure, making the wise simple...

Psalms 19:7b

THE GLORIA

Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.* As it was in the beginning, so it is now and so it shall ever be, world without end.* Alleluia.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

Psalm 148:1

REQUEST FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my delivered; O LORD, do not delay!

Psalm 70:1

THE GREETING

O LORD, I am your servant;* I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.

Psalm 116:16

A READING

Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

2 Samuel 7:4-11, 16

THE LORD'S PRAYER

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Lord God, whose Word is truth and promises never fail, grant us the courage to believe that what you have promised will be carried out and that the work you began in our souls, in the Church, and in the world will be completed. May we look back upon your Word and believe that the God who was faithful in his covenants to Abraham and David, who was faithful to open the closed wombs of Sarah and Hannah, who was faithful to deliver the Hebrew people out of bondage, is the same God we serve. Forgive us when we forget your faithfulness in our history and give into despair and cynicism. Let your promised future Kingdom indwell our minds, hearts, and bodies to such a degree that our actions become part of the your Mission as we seek to bring the restorative agents of peace, justice, grace, and love to this broken world. Give us the boldness to declare as Mary did two thousand years ago, "may it be to me according to your word," through Jesus Christ our Lord who reigns yesterday, today, and forever.
Amen.

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the

message proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to faith and obedience—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Romans 16:25-27

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2008

MORNING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 6 & 9 a.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.* Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will.* Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Psalms 103:20-22

THE GREETING

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,* for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Psalms 115:1

THE REFRAIN

...the decrees of the LORD are sure, making the wise simple...

Psalms 119:76

THE GOSPEL LESSON

SONG OF MARY

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
you, the Almighty, have done great things for me
and holy is your name.
You have mercy on those who fear you,
from generation to generation.
You have shown strength with your arm,
and scattered the proud in their conceit,
casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,
to remember the promise of your mercy,
the promise made to our forebears,
to Abraham and his children forever.

The Covenant Hymnal #989, from Luke 1:47-55

THE REFRAIN

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. *Psalm 118:14*

THE PSALM

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High;* to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night,* to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.* For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;* at the works of your hands I sing for joy. *Psalm 92:1-4*

THE REFRAIN

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. *Psalm 118:14*

THE GLORIA

Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.* As it was in the beginning, so it is now and so it shall ever be, world without end.* Alleluia.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WEEK

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a pure virgin: Grant that I, who have been born again and made your child by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through my Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. *Amen.* ✠

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day: Preserve me with your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. ✠

EVENING OFFICE

To be observed on the hour or half-hour between 5 & 8 p.m.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.* From the rising of the sun to its setting* the name of the LORD is to be praised. *Psalm 113:2-3*

THE GREETING

The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. *Traditional*

THE PSALM

Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling

place,* no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.* For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.* On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.* You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.* Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.* When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.* With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Palm 91:9-16

A READING

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. *1 John 1:1-4*

THE CRY OF THE CHURCH

O God, come to my assistance! O Lord, make haste to help me!

THE GLORIA

Glory be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.* As it was in the beginning, so it is now and so it shall ever be, world without end.* Alleluia.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

A PRAYER FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives. As we continue on this journey, may we not forget the story of Christ's Advent; we wait actively for Christ's coming, even as we rejoice for the work He accomplished 2,000 years ago. Let our prayers be not the sum of our story together, but a part of the journey. Help us to pray not only for ourselves and for others, but to pray in adoration of our Creator, in thanksgiving for our Savior, and in anticipation of the Holy Spirit.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. *Amen.* *Ephesians 3:20-21*

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- *The Editors*

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art:
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
Born thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.*

(Charles Wesley, 1744)



Resurrection Covenant Church

3901 N. Marshfield Ave.

Chicago, IL 60613

(773) 525-2803

www.rescov.org