
Reflections for the
Season of Advent 2019



Edgewood College
Reflections available during Advent at:
www.edgewood.edu/reflections

Catholic tradition sets aside “Advent” time, beginning the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and concluding Christmas Eve. Advent, derived from Latin, means “arrival” or “coming.” Through December’s ever shorter and colder days, Christians await in hope the Light of the World, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Advent’s reflective, hopeful mood can be easily overshadowed by the holiday season’s relentless details and events. We hope you will find this book a source of peace and inspiration throughout the season. The book offers a daily reflection from contributors throughout the Edgewood College community. Their reflections are based on Advent Scripture readings in the Common Christian lectionary. Because of space constraints, generally only a verse or two of the selected Scripture reading is included.

*Dominican Life and Mission
Edgewood College*

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Sunday, December 1

Isaiah 2: 1-5. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

This scripture text talks about the serenity and supremacy of God over the individual interests of people. We need to eradicate all our selfishness and personal desires, envy, hatred and climb this hill of burden to reach the highest mountain of God’s house, which can be thought of as values such as truth, compassion, and love. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” This line tells us to convert our weapons into tools for agriculture. In the modern world, if we use our scientific research for building renewable energy sources and to grow more food, then all of humankind can benefit from it. It is high time to be unified, inclusive and embrace diversity and walk to fulfill our shared vision of achieving our core mission values – truth, compassion, justice, partnership and community, to make this world a beautiful place.

Atreyee Sinha, Associate Professor, Computing and Information Sciences

Monday, December 2

Isaiah 4: 2-6. For over all, God's glory will be shelter and protection: shade from the parching heat of day, refuge and cover from storm and rain.

Hope can carry us in difficult times. In our darkest times, our faith and commitment to Jesus Christ provide us a promise of happy days. “God’s glory will be shelter and protection” for those that truly carry God in their heart. The sun will break through for those that carry that holiness and faithfulness in their heart with a reward of comfort and joy. God is always with us and wants everyone and everything to hear and listen to God, revealing the beauty and glory of the Lord. We must place our hope in that day of judgment and salvation. Strength can be found in our Edgewood values as we navigate transitions in our world and Isaiah reminds us that true love of God will bring us peace, a true blessing, especially during this time of Advent today.

Matt Jurvelin, Assistant Dean, Henry Predolin School of Nursing

Tuesday, December 3

Isaiah 11: 1-10a. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of God, as water covers the sea.

For me, this passage starts off by reminding us of the cycle of life: roots, bud, blossom. There is always a change, and we are always in this place of becoming. I find myself immediately going to this idea of home. Home is where I ultimately feel safe. And I suppose we are all looking for home and for a place—our place—in this world. We often tend to look to what once was or what lies behind us...what is known. But that is limiting. Only by embracing what is always going to be unknown, can we truly be open to accept all places as home. Even places that may seem unsafe, can open to us if we understand wherever we are, we are home.

Doug Wandersee, Academic Success Coordinator

Wednesday, December 4

Isaiah 25: 6-10. On this mountain the God of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.

This passage describes an epic party. Someone who uses phrases like “rich food” and “choice wines” not once in a sentence, but twice, is trying desperately to make a point. God is planning to dust off the good china, raid the wine cellar, light the oven and throw a serious mountain-top shindig. And destroy death for dessert. At this time, some 700 years BCE, the region was in turmoil. For many people life felt risky and perilous. Hope for a brighter future was needed. They required help. Isaiah assures them that God is there for them, and all will be well. In our current world things are not universally going so well either. Hope and help are needed and sometimes in short supply. Instead of promising a banquet, we can commit to partnering in community to create equal opportunity for all, where things that truly matter are in abundant supply.

*Amy Schiebel, Associate Professor
Office of Science Outreach Director*

Thursday, December 5 **Isaiah 26: 1-6. Trust in God forever!**

Trust: the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

What does it mean to trust God? To trust yourself? To surrender, and trust life? Each day, we rise with the hope of positive outcomes, joy, and peace. We hope for the best, but inevitably experience the challenges of life that so often come with the territory: stress, uncertainty, and confusion. For some, like myself, it is easier to focus on these negative encounters rather than the beauty and value within us and around us. Our minds become troubled with what is going wrong, and cannot focus on the good that is transforming us and our world. Life is such a precious gift, and we only have one life to experience. Trust and embrace yourself, and the talents which you bring. A wise young woman once told me, “Do your best, and then trust life.”

*Marissa Blackmore, Cutting Edge Coordinator
Edgewood College B.A. 2016, M.A. 2018*

Friday, December 6 **Isaiah 29: 17-24. The humble also will increase their joy in God, and the poor among humanity will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.**

When I read this scripture I think of the humble and poor in health and spirit. I think of the universal question of why an all-loving God would allow the unhappiness, suffering, and injustices of this world. I can't help but think of my sweet son, as I watch his body being attacked by a rare genetic disease, and wonder, why him? C. S. Lewis suggests that we struggle with this question because our finite, human minds selfishly believe that pain-free lives would prove that God loves us. However, he asserts that "Love, in its own nature, demands the perfecting of the beloved," and that he has seen "great beauty of spirit" in some who have suffered. Thus, I think that spiritual refinement can be realized in the furnace of suffering and affliction. I believe that this explains why my son has an aura of peace and love that touches all whom he meets. By being humble in his suffering, his spirit is being perfected and refined by an all-loving God. In his own way, my son has interpreted *Isaiah 29:19* for me, and taught me how the poor and humble will find joy and rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel.

David Lambert, Associate Professor, Psychology

Saturday, December 7

Isaiah 30: 19-21, 23-26. God will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst. No longer will your Teacher hide, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher, while from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: "This is the way; walk in it," when you would turn to the right or to the left.

Isaiah tells us a voice will sound in our ears, saying "This is the way; walk in it." He assures us we will not be without a guide, no matter where our choices take us. We receive comfort and reassurance when we understand there is no distance too great for God to cover. Even when we may stray, that protective voice will call us back.

Patricia Egan, Senior Lecturer, Social Sciences Department

Sunday, December 8

Romans 15: 4-9. That by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

This portion of the selected text reflects our family's past year and a half. After a cancer diagnosis in our 6 month old grandson, followed by

a 54 minute code, we had little visible hope. We found ourselves reaching out to family and friends for encouragement, prayers, and support. It was through their encouragement, supportive prayers, and unconditional love, we found ourselves gaining a tremendous sense of hope. Though our battles were fought in seconds, hours, days, weeks, and months, the prayers, encouragement, and hope from loved ones provided us the the strength and courage to believe. Hope is a gift that has been given to all of us. It helps us endure our darkest hours. It provides us with the light to truly believe in the better tomorrows.

*Deborah Stamler, Director of Clinical Experiences
and Performance Assessment, School of Education*

**Monday, December 9: Immaculate Conception of Mary
Luke 1: 26-38. Nothing is impossible for God.**

These are the words Mary heard the angel Gabriel speak after he told her that Elizabeth, her elderly relative, would give birth to a son in her old age and that she herself would be the mother of the Savior. Mary made a feeble protest –“How can this be?”– before Gabriel reminded her that she was dealing with God, who can do all things. At first Mary thought it depended on her to follow through on Gabriel’s announcement. We do the same all the time, thinking that we are in charge. Then Mary got the drift, realizing that God was the one who could make the unthinkable happen. As we move closer to Christmas, we can use these days to deepen our awareness that God is in charge of our lives, too. As we contemplate the intentions for which we pray so intently, with Mary we can say, “Be it done unto me according to your Word.” For nothing is impossible with God.

Ann McCullough, O.P., Board of Trustees

**Tuesday, December 10
Isaiah 40:1-11. A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of God...The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley...Like a shepherd God feeds the flock.... .**

In today’s reading, the writer-prophet poetically delivers a cry from God to prepare the way out of exile for the Israelites. The Jews had been held in captivity for over 60 years. Returning home from Babylon meant going over the treacherous and often dangerous roads of the Judean desert. The desert is a hostile environment and the highways are

high, jagged, steep, and winding. Yet the prophet promises that God is coming to shepherd them safely home. They must prepare. What holds *us* in exile? High and mighty arrogance? Sharp words and thoughts? Steep expectations of ourselves and others? God calls to us to prepare the way for God, too. Smooth over old hurts. Fill in the pot-holes of our hearts. Sweep away the petty differences. Our God is coming to save us. What can we do today to make God's highway into our hearts more welcoming?

Kay Parish, Edgewood College Ed.D., 2010

Wednesday, December 11

Isaiah 40: 25-31. Do you not know or have you not heard?

In this passage we see hurting people who do not fully understand the power of God. They are asked multiple questions-mostly rhetorical. What stands out most is the last sentence. They are asked, have you not heard the great things God will do for you? If you place your hope in God, you will be renewed, and you will gain the strength to carry on. In many ways this is relevant to the world we are currently living in. At a time when there is so much hate, disgust, confusion, and hurting, we need to be reminded that our hope should lie with God. It is in God that we will have renewed strength to keep working for, pursuing, and creating a just and compassionate world.

*Tess Ferzoco, Director of Undergraduate Admissions
Edgewood College B.A., 2015, M.A., 2019*

Thursday, December 12: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zechariah 2: 14-17. Sing and rejoice, daughter Zion! Now, I am coming to dwell in your midst. Many nations will bind themselves to God on that day. They will be my people, and I will dwell in your midst. Then you shall know that the God of hosts has sent me to you. God will inherit Judah as a portion of the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Silence, all people, in the presence of God, who stirs forth from the holy dwelling.

God's promise "*to dwell in your midst*," was made repeatedly to the threatened, oppressed or colonized people of ancient Israel. We hear it often in the Advent readings, most famously in Isaiah's "A virgin will conceive and bear *Emmanuel: God-With-Us* (see Dec 22nd). Today's feast celebrates the appearance of "Holy Mary, Mother of the True God" to the Aztec, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin, in 1531. Appearing as a

young, pregnant, brown-skinned girl, Mary brings a similar promise to the newly colonized and oppressed peoples of Mexico: She asks that a shrine be built so she “*may therein exhibit and give all my love, compassion, help, and protection, ...to you, and to all the inhabitants on this land. ...[I will] listen to their lamentations, and remedy all their miseries, afflictions and sorrows.*” God’s is ready to *dwell in **our** midst* as love and compassion. Will we let God in?

John Leonard, Chairperson and Professor-Religious Studies

Friday, December 13

Isaiah 48: 17-19. Your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence.

What spoke out most to me in this scripture was, “Their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence.” Your history and your past will always be engrained in things you do, who you are and what decisions you make. Your family, friends and God will never be too far away from you and forever will be in your heart.

Jaiona Spell, Sophomore, Biology: Pre-Med

Saturday, December 14

Psalm 80:2ac, 3b, 15-16, 18-19. O God, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

The Psalmist beseeches God to restore Israel to its former state of glory because Israel has been deserted by God and her sanctuary destroyed. Israel is however optimistic that if only God’s face would shine on her in compassion (Numbers 6:25), her deliverance would be assured. As Christians, we overcome our past mistakes by God’s grace and become what God purposed for us. God is not interested in what we once were, rather, God is interested in what we can become. Paul was given a second chance and so was Jonah when he escaped his divine mission. Our God is faithful and is ever ready to restore all that was stolen in our life. Have you done something in your past that you are ashamed of? Have you ever felt that you disappointed God? God is a God of unlimited second chances, always willing and ready to restore you to your former status.

*Grace Bando, Director of Student Accessibility
and Disability Services*

Sunday, December 15

Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10. The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song...streams will burst forth in the desert...the burning sands will become pools...A highway will be there, called the holy way...It is for those with a journey to make.

Life can be like a desert, dry and burning. When a death occurs you can feel dried up and alone. Or, after many years of a marriage, the love between a man and a woman can dry up and become like a desert. At some time and some place we have all walked the dry ground in the desert. But as the Word of God says in Isaiah, "When the Messiah comes the deserts will bloom." When Jesus Christ came he quickly watered those deserts and made their lives bloom again. Take for example the story of the prodigal son. The son had squandered his money and longed for food to eat. His life was a desert, dry and burning. Or take the example of the prostitute; her life was a desert in both the present and the past. So how is it that these people's lives bloomed again? Only through the living water of Jesus Christ did their deserts bloom again. As we experience the Advent season, may we drink deeply from God's Word and be reminded that when the Messiah comes the deserts will bloom again.

*Bethany Brewster, Head Coach, Cross Country and Track
Edgewood College M.S., 2014*

Monday, December 16

Psalms 25: 4-5b, 8-10, 14. Your ways, O God, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me.

Proverbs 22:6. Train a child in the way one should go; and when one is old, one will not depart from it. My parents successfully raised eleven children on a farm in North Carolina. We all went to college and made something of our lives beyond being "educated." As children growing up in a strict, yet nurturing environment, my parents provided the necessary building blocks for our future. We were raised in a dutiful home and sometimes thought the world was passing us by. Some of our friends seemed to have the liberty to live their lives as they pleased without seeking permissions from their parents to do anything. Looking back, I wish some of our friends had experienced a similar upbringing. Many of them did not fare well because they did not have benefit of the

integrity, discipline, and values our parents provided. My siblings are now middle age and older and some are parents. As parents, we occasionally reflect on the values our parents taught us from the intrinsic wisdom of Proverbs 22:6. It is a verse my parents had underlined in the family Bible, and it is a verse they had gently referenced often. This verse, however, means far more than what it denotes. My parents substituted the word *teach* in place of the word *train* because they believed children benefited from learning life lessons through caring, well-ordered adults—and to them—these life lessons formed the core of character education. Proverbs 22:6 is relevant today because it is necessary to encourage parents to provide children with a firm foothold early on because the well-being of future generations depends and relies on the ones that pave the way.

*Marihelen Denning Stoltz, Senior Adjunct Professor,
Communications Studies Department
Edgewood College, M.A., 1998*

Tuesday, December 17

Psalm 72: 1-4b, 7-8, 17. He shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted ones with judgment. The mountains shall yield peace for the people, and the hills justice.

As a social studies teacher I often remind myself of our main mission as educators. It is simple and clear; to create enlightened citizens. This scripture reminds me of my spiritual mission to create enlightened people of faith. God governs all people with justice and compassion, and does not rank or place more importance on you or your neighbor. God loves us all, realizing that we will never reach perfection, but it is the journey of faith that pleases God so. In church this morning we sang a familiar hymn, “Lift Every Voice and Sing:” *Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us; Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us; (James W. Johnson, 1871-1938)* I believe that God wants all of us to learn from our past and embrace our future. God will govern people with justice and we must continue in our journey of faith.

Lisa Carey, Lecturer, School of Education

Wednesday, December 18

Jeremiah 23: 5-8. He shall do what is just and right in the land.

As I read this passage, I am reminded of the importance of remaining positive in times of stress and uncertainty. As we look forward to a time of change, it is understandable to question the road ahead and to wonder what the future holds. Every day we are presented with a variety of choices. We can choose to be angry and frustrated; we can give in to our fear and anger. We can take out our frustrations on those around us. Or, we can choose a different path. We can opt instead to live out our Dominican values such that our faith and kindness breaks through the uncertainty and shines a light onto the shared road ahead. We can treat one another with love and respect and compassion. I for one am choosing the path of brightness and light, of hopefulness and love. I hope you will join me.

*Amy Pikalek, Executive Director of Marketing
and Strategic Communications*

Thursday, December 19

Psalms 71: 3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17. You have taught me from childhood, God, and all my life I have proclaimed your marvelous works. Now that I am old and my hair is gray, do not forsake me, God, until I have extolled your strength to generations yet to come.

We took turns spending the night with my grandmother at the hospice. I had what ended up being the last night. Although she'd been lucid until the last couple of days, reassuring me that she wasn't afraid, I was terrified. My best friend, teacher, and champion was going somewhere I couldn't follow. It was a long, difficult night. I struggled for the right thing to do or say. What words would I want to guide me on my way? What would she choose, if our positions were reversed? Finally I picked up the Bible and began reading the Psalms aloud. The dark night seeped away.

Rachel Poulsen, Associate Professor, English Department

Friday, December 20

Isaiah 7: 10-14. God will give you this sign.

Is your God fear inducing, ready to condemn and punish? Ahaz in this reading seems to think so. Fortunately, the prophet Isaiah does not endorse this image of a small, mean God. Personally, I am so touched these days with the cosmic generosity of a God who with compassion pours life into all the living, who bursts through the ordinary everyday with pure holiness. “Therefore, God will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” What could be more ordinary or more holy than the birth of a child into this world even at a time like this, perhaps especially at a time like ours with so much greed, corruption, death and despair. These ordinary miracles remind us that God is truly with us. Let us be alert today to recognize the signs of God in the midst of our everyday.

*Isabel Rafferty, O.P., Art Department
Edgewood College B.S., 1984*

Saturday, December 21

Zephaniah 3:14-18. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!. . .God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; one who will rejoice over you with gladness, you will be renewed in love; you will be exulted over with loud singing as on a day of festival.

I have always been fascinated with the power of the Old Testament; it often is downright frightening in its description of retribution and disaster. Especially the Books of the so-called “minor Prophets”—it’s as if they knew they were only going to get a few chapters in “the Book,” so they packed their writing with their best stuff, the most imaginative and powerful imagery. Largely, Zephaniah is no exception, except for these verses, which immediately follow long sections of the most horrific prophecy. In this Advent season, in this season of hope, it’s as if we are being told, that amid all the horrible things going on in the world, all the very stressful circumstances in our lives, all the uncertainty, we can hope, and rejoice. We may not be able to do all we’d like to do, to affect change for the better, but we *can* hope, and have hope. Certainly the current world situation requires that we at least hope for a better world, that we hope for the “new world” promised in the scripture. So, Sing and Rejoice O Sons and Daughters of Edgewood, of this sacred land, of this World: Sing and Rejoice in your own way, your own space and your own time. Amid all that is frightening in this modern world, and everything anxious and stressful in our daily lives, we *can* hope.

Blake Walter, Associate Professor, Music

Sunday, December 22

Matthew 1: 18-24. The angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.”

What so inspires me in this reading is the fearlessness that Joseph showed in accepting Mary as his wife. Here he was, a simple, faithful man of God asked to break away from his traditional belief to trust his dreams, a visitation from an angel, and the relationship he had with Mary. We know in our work as nurses with pregnant families that a loving and supportive intimate relationship is important for a mother-to-be to have a healthy pregnancy and birth. So lovely to see this reflected in this scripture!

*Mary Elizabeth Bathum, Professor
Henry Predolin School of Nursing*

Monday, December 23

Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24. Yes, he is coming, says the God of hosts.

The greatest Gift that our Heavenly Father gives us is purpose. When we are born, God instills in us GPS chips that steer us to a specific destination. Along the way, there are many stops, allowing us to perform simple acts of kindness and jobs that demonstrate benevolence. The journey is long and demanding, but what better way to serve God than to be a messenger and example of God’s Holy word. God’s example of peace, love, and joy is a perfect model for us to follow. God is constantly leaving bread crumbs along the way that guide and direct our paths. Our rewards are not instantly realized, but they are guaranteed like money in the bank. As the radiance of God’s work continues to shine bright and thrust us further into God’s magnificent peace and joy for the world, we are fortified and made even stronger to carry out God’s mission.

Willie Larkin, Chief of Staff/Diversity Officer

Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24

Isaiah 9: 1-6. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

What does it mean to have seen a great light? Once seen, it cannot be unseen. We are drawn to the light in an atmosphere of darkness. Light

is welcomed, it is cherished, and upon recognition, its beauty clarifies all things that came before it, and provides a new perspective on all of the sufferings of the past. When we embrace the shining light, we witness and understand God's unconditional love for us. And what a gift this is! Suffering has no discernible lingering quality in the warm glow of unconditional love. The rightful place of suffering is as an instrument of teaching what it means to be human, not as blinders that shield us from gratefully accepting unconditional love. Abandon the sufferings and feelings of unworthiness that keep us from walking into the light and accepting this sacred gift.

Brenda del Moral, Associate Professor, Biological Sciences

Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25

Luke 2: 1-20. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

I am always struck by Mary's response to the shepherds' good news. While everyone else is marveling at – perhaps boisterously celebrating – the angels' proclamations about the Savior born in their midst, Mary silently places this news about her baby boy in her heart and ponders. While others celebrate the birth of a Messiah, Mary contemplates the child at her breast. Her pondering of the Christ is, in other words, fiercely intimate. One could argue that the center of intelligence is in the heart, not the brain, because it is the heart that knows love. Mary reflects in her heart because she is immersed in intimate love. If each of us could love God in this intimate way, and if we could see how deeply connected this love is to caring for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned (cf. Matt 25:35-39), then truly Christ would be in our midst. It was for Mary to love God in a baby boy; it is for each of us to love God in the ones who are vulnerable now.

*Rebecca Meier-Rao, Lecturer Religious Studies
Co-Director of the Center for Global Education*

Thank you for sharing this Advent Journey with us — to all who contributed reflections, and to you who have taken the time to pause, read, reflect, and pray during this Season. We wish you the joy, hope and peace of Christmas.

*Dominican Life and Mission
Edgewood College*

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We welcome your feedback. Please email jmaglior@edgewood.edu

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