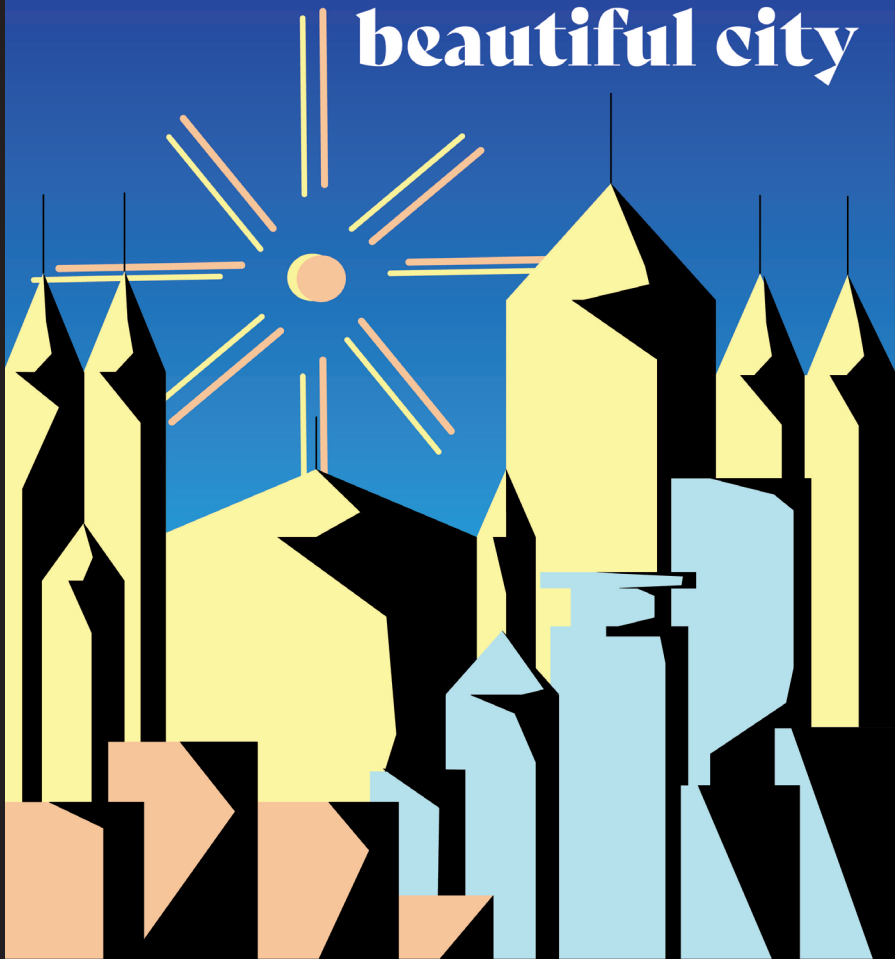


oh, what a

beautiful city



The 44th Annual Augsburg University Advent Vespers 2023

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Advent Vespers

Devotional 2023

Oh What a Beautiful City

Dear Friends:

As we once again enter the sacred season of Advent, Augsburg faculty, alumni, and friends offer these words to guide you into the season of longing, hope, anticipation, reflection, and renewal. We pray, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and come; be our light for the world to see!”

Augsburg’s founding scriptural passage is found in John 1:14, where the Evangelist proclaims, “And the Word became flesh, and lived among us...” This year, we will hear in the Vespers liturgy, Eugene Peterson’s compelling translation of that verse: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” For Augsburg, this is a powerful theological claim. God came into the world – Love incarnate. At the same time, this is a compelling practical claim. God in Jesus Christ has redeemed God’s people and now we are the Word made flesh in the world – God’s people called to God’s work in the world – in the city - God loves so much.

In these fraught times, this is the moment once again to remember and celebrate the stories about what God is calling us to be and do in the world as the Word made flesh – stories of light, hope, faith, and love. May you find in these devotions the stories and insights that propel your lives of faith in the world.

I am so grateful for Auggies and their faithful witness echoed in these thoughtful words. I commend these devotions to you and yours.

Advent Blessings,

Paul C. Pribbenow, Ph.D.

Friday, December 1

John 1:14 (MSG)

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

Glory is a word that comes up more than once in this scripture text. For me, in this Gospel of John, Glory means “honoring God by revealing God.” To reveal God, we need to be neighbors to one another and love those around us. For some, that may be showing up for those in need or even being a part of a certain community.

In this verse, we read that the message of God through Jesus was created. Jesus walked alongside people and they saw him do amazing things. Jesus represented the heart of God by showing forgiveness and acceptance of all sinners. The apostle John bears witness that he saw Jesus do these miracles. John saw him, walked with him, and talked with him -- and in sharing this, it reveals the Glory of God. May we all practice generosity with each other as we continue to be neighbors.

Sarah Runck '24

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 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. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

With all the suffering in the world and the chaos caused by our indifference to one another, we call out to God, the creator and redeemer, to be powerfully present among us. Like the writer of this passage from thousands of years ago, we seek God's justice in the world. Yet, we are also reminded in this passage that we are all created in God's image. God, before whom the mountains quake, created and loves each one of us, and we are called, in turn, to love one another and care for our neighbors – in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our country, and in the world.

Janice Dames

Sunday, December 3

Psalm 122:1-2, 6-9

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."
For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

The pursuit of peace is a beautiful and essential aspiration. It is a central tenet of most religions and spiritual practices. This pursuit of peace spans countries, cultures, identities, and ages, and provides us with a common path forward.

Where there is peace, there is safety, security, wellness, friendship, community, justice, joy, love. We are whole.

Mitakuye Oyasin. Om Shanti. Peace. Salaam. Shalom.

No matter what your religion, spirituality, or worldview is, may peace be upon you and may we seek the light and good in all. May the pursuit of peace provide a light in turbulent times.

Michon True Smith '97

“All Who Love and Serve Your City,” v. 1-3

Monday, December 4

All who love and serve your city,
all who bear its daily stress,
all who cry for peace and justice,
all who curse and all who bless,

Risen One, shall yet the city
be the city of despair?
Come today, our judge, our glory.
Be its name “The Lord is there!”

In your day of loss and sorrow,
in your day of helpless strife,
honor, peace, and love retreating,
seek the Lord, who is your life.

-- Text: Erik Routley

Those who love and serve their city know their city. How well do you know your city, or the area in which you live your life? This might not be an actual city. Maybe it's a neighborhood, or a town, or an apartment complex. Do you love it? Do you bear its daily stress? Do you cry for peace and justices in its streets and hallways? Do you find yourself both cursing and blessing this community where you and so many others live their lives? I imagine the answer to all of these questions is a resounding, “yes!”

Our neighborhoods are the places where we make our first friends, where we have our first kiss, where we learn, and play, and fight. Our neighborhoods are where we fall in love, raise our families, share meals, and watch each other's backs. There are gardens in our neighborhoods. There are bones in our neighborhoods. There is turmoil in our neighborhoods. There are peacemakers in our neighborhoods.

Do you love and serve your city? Do you know your city? Walk your city today, or take a ride through it, with the words of this hymn in your ears. Keep your eyes wide open because you learn that the Lord is there! Right there in the city you call home.

Jeremy Myers

Tuesday, December 5

Hebrews 12:2

..Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

When your path in life does not seem straight but instead rather windy, this verse tells us to look to Jesus because Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. As a pioneer of our faith, Jesus marked a trail for us to follow in confidence. Jesus faced trials, temptation, and the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Jesus shows us that through even the most difficult times, you can overcome and persevere. As well as the pioneer, Jesus is also the perfecter. He isn't just leading us partway, but He is there fully for us. Jesus endured unimaginable suffering and embarrassment by being hung on the cross, but He did this because of the joy set before Him—the joy of reconciling us to God, the joy of redemption, the joy of our eternal relationship with Him.

In our trials, let us remember to fix our gaze on Jesus. Let's remember the joy that awaits us, the joy of an eternal relationship with Him, the joy of being perfected through our struggles. Just as Jesus disregarded the shame of the cross for a greater purpose, we too can persevere through our difficulties, knowing that a greater joy awaits us. Our struggles are temporary, but the joy set before us is eternal.

Cynthia Faber '24

Mark 13:24-31

Wednesday, December 6

“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.

Thursday, December 7

Isaiah 40:1-5 (MSG)

“Comfort, oh comfort my people,”
says your God.
“Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem,
but also make it very clear
That she has served her sentence,
that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!
She’s been punished enough and more than enough,
and now it’s over and done with.”
Thunder in the desert!
“Prepare for God’s arrival!
Make the road straight and smooth,
a highway fit for our God.
Fill in the valleys,
level off the hills,
Smooth out the ruts,
clear out the rocks.
Then God’s bright glory will shine
and everyone will see it.
Yes. Just as God has said.”

Much like the Israelites, we are living in tumultuous times, from extreme polarization induced by the current political climate to the grief we carry from the impact of war, coupled with everything in between. These experiences produce feelings of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, forcing us to question God. In those moments where there is a sense of hopelessness, loss, and despair, hold onto the meaning of Advent, Jesus. He came into the world as our Prince of Peace, strength, and ultimate comforter. Make room for how God will turn sorrow into joy, ashes into beauty, and darkness into light this Advent season.

Jessica Brooks

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, 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. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

How ironic! We describe God in terms of power - omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. We almost fatalistically interpret everything as being according to God's plan. What does God give us? God' patience! Not as in God passively waiting from afar but inseparable from God's promised presence in the midst of our suffering to bring forth life. Witness the cross!

As the horrific signs and sounds of war resound and casualties mount, God's patience is a gift of grace so that "no one may perish and all come to repentance." Repentance is the acknowledgment that we have come to a dead end in the way we treat one another, destroy the creation, engage in war, tolerate violence and hatred. Repentance is to live today as signs of God's promised future "when God's justice will reside". Peace - not as the absence of conflict but as the presence of restorative justice and reconciliation - will be our way of life.

The Rev. Mark Hanson '68

Saturday, December 9

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” v. 1

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.

What words stand out to you in this verse? For me, it's this combination:
“Long expected... From our fears... Hope of all...”

As I consider current events today, I anticipate the first two phrases resonate with many these days.

I too am long expecting and desiring peace in the midst of fears from wars and pain and suffering and strife. There is brokenness, and it feels long overdue for something to disrupt the messiness of the world.

And isn't that what Advent is all about? This time of preparation and expectation to celebrate the birth of Christ is a journey towards something new. It's a pilgrimage to peace. It's a promise of good news that brings about reconciliation. This Advent journey brings hope for all.

Dear friends, this holy encounter with the divine sets us free. Peace and restoration of community is long expected in all of the fear of this world. But the unconditional love of God made known through Christ brings hope eternal.

Nate Berkas

Luke 1:26-33 (*Inclusive*)

Sunday, December 10

Six months later, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary; she was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. Upon arriving, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favored one! God is with you! Blessed are you among women!"

Mary was deeply troubled by these words and wondered what the angel's greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You'll conceive and bear a son, and give him the name Jesus - 'Deliverance.' His dignity will be great, and he will be called the Only Begotten of God. God will give Jesus the judgment seat of David, his ancestor, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will never end."

There have been plenty of moments in my own life where I have been confused and uncertain of what is to come in the midst of the unknown just as Mary is. My heart pounds, my chest feels heavy, I can feel the uncertainty deep in my body. In those moments, I have found that I have my own Gabriel that comes to me. Sometimes in the form of another person, a phone call, a neighbor saying hello, a warm embrace. Sometimes it is the way a snowflake falls on my face. Or the wind gracing me with its presence. And sometimes, it can be found in me. My own hand on my chest reminding me to breathe deeply. Listening deeply to what my body needs. Just like Gabriel telling Mary that God is with her into the unknown, we all have our own Gabriels that show up for us reminding us that we too are loved.

Ellen Weber

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.”

When hearing this Gospel lesson, my mind almost always goes to the opening scene of the 1973 movie musical, *Godspell*. Set in New York City, the movie begins with John the Baptist calling the disciples out of their daily routines with the tune, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The individuals make their way to Bethesda fountain in Central Park, where they splash around with John the Baptist and jump for joy. From there, the story unfolds.

How are we being called out of our daily lives to pay attention and notice where Christ is present in the world? In the Northern hemisphere, we are transitioning into a season where creation rests and nature becomes a lot like the mysteriously empty New York City in *Godspell*. Advent reminds me that we are invited to pause, slow down, and listen to the voices crying out in the wilderness, so that we might be transformed by the power of God’s love for all creation.

“Down Along Chicago Avenue,” v. 1-3

Tuesday, December 12

1. Jesus was born to an unwed mother.
Glory, Glory, What glory!
The outlook wasn't bright.
But how the angels sang that night
Down along Chicago Avenue.

2. Deep in her coat Mary held her baby.
Glory, Glory, What glory!
She found the shelter door.
A woman smiled and welcomed her
Down along Chicago Avenue.

3. Hope for the world, cuddled by the homeless.
Glory, Glory, What glory!
But many heads were turned
And missed the dream of peace that burned
Down along Chicago Avenue.

--Bret Hesda

“O magnum mysterium,” the ancient text goes, “O great mystery that animals should see the newborn Lord.” It might be said that the point of this beautiful and oft-set text (choral) is that the birth of the Savior went unnoticed by common folk who simply were going about their business. I grew up blocks from Chicago Avenue and, for nearly two decades, served a congregation on the street. So the first time I heard Bret Hesda's text it captivated me. Unwed mother. Yup. Homeless. At that moment, yup. Shelter door. Yup. All right here in our midst. ALL right here in our midst – down along Chicago Avenue...or Riverside...or Cedar. O magnum mysterium indeed!

Mark Sedio '76

Wednesday, December 13

“Down Along Chicago Avenue,” v. 4-6

4. Far, far away, Farmers gazing skyward
Glory, Glory, What glory!
beheld the northern lights.
But none could see that heav'nly sight
Down along Chicago Avenue.

5. Wake, Mary, wake! to the winter morning.
Glory, Glory, What glory!
Quick, grab a bite to eat.
At seven you're back on the street
Down along Chicago Avenue.

6. Bring gifts, you wise, for the babe before you.
Glory, Glory, What glory!
Oh, find it in your heart
To give these two a healthy start
Down along Chicago Avenue.

The Christmas narrative, so familiar to all of us – Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus in the manger, the shepherds, angels, wise ones – can seem romantic to those of us ensconced in our warm homes and lives. We sing lovely carols and exchange our gifts... But the reality in the narrative is not so romantic – a homeless family, poor shepherds struggling to make a living, immigrant itinerants searching for meaning... And the reality in our own moment, in our own cities, mirrors that Biblical reality – Down along Chicago Avenue, where farmers and unhoused mothers and all those seeking for justice and compassion are in our midst, calling us this Christmas to the faithful work of being neighbor and building healthy neighborhoods.
May it ever be so.

Paul C. Pribbenow

Luke 1:46b-55
(Magnificat)

Thursday, December 14

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.”

By the time Johann Sebastian Bach was ten years of age, he'd lost his mother, father and two siblings. Still, he went on to compose more than a thousand pieces of music, some of which are the most prominent in Western music history. Bach's Magnificat (D major, BWV 243) captures the essence of Mary's song, infusing it with musical brilliance and spiritual depth. Just as Bach, in the midst of hardship, transformed Mary's words into a masterpiece, we are invited to find hope in the midst of challenge.

While our day-to-day existence may feel much less profound than Mary's or Bach's, God works through us. As we juggle complex demands, do we look for moments of joy and divine intervention? Somewhere in the abundance of activity, might we find opportunities for awe and gratitude that serve as a compass towards our own calling? When can our words make a difference? When can our actions provide comfort or remove obstacles? How do we find purpose within an obstacle? It is in the moments of daily activity that we are invited to sing with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

Sarah Erkkinen

Friday, December 15

Isaiah 58:10-12
(Inclusive)

If you give yourself to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
Then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your shadows will become like noon.

God will always guide you,
giving relief in desert places.
God will give strength to your bones
and you will be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never run dry.

You will rebuild the ancient ruins,
and build upon age-old foundations.
You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
and Restorer of Ruined Neighborhoods.

A few years ago, a friend of mine from college noticed that food insecurity was on the rise in his neighborhood. He and his family reached out to friends and neighbors to collect extra food and distribute it to the community. It started out small. They left ten or twelve grocery bags in their front yard filled with some pantry staples and put the word out that the bags were there for anyone who needed them. Ten or twelve bags turned to 30, then 40. And pretty soon their front yard became a local food pantry - and a place where genuine community was being built.

Isaiah's message is simple yet so powerful, and sums up what was taking place in my friends' neighborhood: Generosity can be transformational. When our generosity is genuine and expressed in solidarity with "the least of these" (to borrow a phrase from the Gospel of Matthew), it can truly change people and communities.

May your light rise. And may your generosity be radical and transformational.

John Anderson

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women will come back to Jerusalem, sit on benches on the streets and spin tales, move around safely with their canes - a good city to grow old in. And boys and girls will fill the public parks, laughing and playing - a good city to grow up in.

Zechariah is describing a city where folks can flourish, a neighborhood where people can belong.

I'd like to live in that city. Wouldn't you?

His message is more than a promise. Chapters 7-8 indicate that this renewed city can't happen without God's people joining in the work of justice, mercy and compassion. Zechariah asks his audience, "Will you become the people who are ready to participate in God's Kingdom?"

Think of your own city or neighborhood. Ponder these questions...

What would need to happen for it to be a good city to grow old in?

What would need to change for it to be a good city to grow up in?

How might your neighbors answer these questions?

Zechariah's vision, like your responses to these questions, is God's dream for you and the people you share community with. This city can't exist without us. Just as it can't exist without God. God's purpose for you and your neighbor is for flourishing and belonging.

Will you become the people who are ready to participate in God's Kingdom, right where you are?

Kristina Frugé

Sunday, December 17

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. I also saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride and groom on their wedding day.

And I heard a loud voice calling from the throne, "Look! God's Tabernacle is among humankind! God will live with them; they will be God's people, and God will be fully present among them. The Most High will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death, mourning, crying and pain will be no more, for the old order has fallen."

In the cold, dark, and gloominess of a Minnesota winter, how warming and soothing it is to be called "God's People" and have the Most High caring and watching in us in the same presence. How lucky and grace filled we are to have all our problems, trauma, pain, and tears to be wiped away by the most high everlasting grace and care for his people. For we know that God created us in his perfect image and likeness and we know his work is so so great and to better his chosen people. The saying goes "God's got us right where he wants us" and praying in that and believing in that can keep you warm on the coldest and darkest nights. Godspeed to all and may his grace fill us up.

Marcus Santillana '23

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.

“Do not quench the spirit... hold fast to what is good.” Advent is an opportune time to take these words to heart and act on them. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson speaks about the Spirit-Sophia as the presence of the living God in our world. She describes how the Spirit is present in three ways: in the natural world around us, in the give and take of loving relationships, and in the struggle of groups for social justice. I feel called to find the Spirit alive in the wonders of nature and at the same time feel challenged to work with the Spirit in creating a more sustainable environment. I feel moved to bring the Spirit to all of my relationships, to mirror the unconditional love of God. Finally, in the wake of so much suffering in the world, I feel propelled to support people and groups who are working to create a just and peaceful world. In this Advent season, let us hold fast to the good and make the Spirit’s presence known.

Matthew Maruggi

Tuesday, December 19

Isaiah 52:7-10 (Inclusive)

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of one who brings good news -
who announces peace,
and brings news of happy things,
and proclaims deliverance,
saying to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Listen! Those who keep watch raise a cry,
together they shout for joy -
for they see with their own eyes
God's restoration of Zion!

Break out together in song,
O ruins of Jerusalem!
For God comforts the people,
and redeems Jerusalem.

God bears a holy arm
in the sight of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth will behold
the salvation of our God!

In the ebb and flow of life, we encounter souls placed before us by a divine hand, not by chance but by design. These individuals are the mountains echoing the closeness of the Divine, affirming that triumph is not a distant hope but a present reality. They are messengers of endurance, teaching us that joy isn't merely the product of happy circumstances but a dance we choose in the midst of life's rain.

This reflection invites you to dance, to find happiness not because everything is perfect, but because you choose to embrace the joy within you. It's a call to recognize that the Divine has always been by your side, manifesting through those who remind us of an ever-present grace.

Geoffrey Gill

- 1 Build a longer table, not a higher wall,
 feeding those who hunger, making room for all.
 Feasting together, stranger turns to friend,
 Christ breaks walls to pieces; false divisions end.

- 2 Build a safer refuge, not a larger jail;
 where the weak find shelter, mercy will not fail.
 For any place where justice is denied,
 Christ will breach the jail wall, freeing all inside.

--David Bjorlin

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to God. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:13-20

Thursday, December 21

Psalm 126

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."
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.

Walking along Minnehaha Creek as it meanders through my neighborhood is
one of my favorite ways to experience the city of Minneapolis. I share my walk
with many companions - blue herons, wood ducks, beavers, fish - along with
humans walking dogs, humans pushing babies in strollers and humans speeding
along on bikes. However, this summer, my walk didn't bring me joy. It didn't
rain for weeks and the creek slowly dwindled to a trickle. Where once there was
a flowing, life-filled stream, now there was a muddy causeway marked with large
puddles with desperate fish. The smell of drying mud/dying plants/decaying fish
oozed out and over the pathway. There was absolutely nothing I could do but
pray and wait. The rains came in September. Minnehaha Creek - my water-
course in the Negeb - was filled again with bubbling water, roaring falls and life.
The writer of Psalm 126 understood the bone-deep connection between water,
life and joy.

KC Gubrud

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.

Everything this vision promises turns around the giving of a child whose presence opens a new page in the city. Once there was unrest; yet peace will now prevail. Everyone recounts traumatic cries of injustice that have left the city shattered and afraid; now justice sings in a different key, one which names the presence of both despair and hope, brokenness and wholeness, separation and togetherness, sin and healing. The child's presence sets loose hope and imagination, breaking through numbness of unyielding hunger and homelessness and hatred. The child's presence comes to, "...establish and uphold [the kingdom]," not with empty promises, but "...with justice and with righteousness"; not when elections are held, but, "...from this time onward and forevermore." (v. 7) This child's presence opens things up in the City of David, the City of Water, and the City of God – for us, and for the sake of the world.

The Rev. Paul Lutter

Saturday, December 23

John 1:1-14 (NRSV)

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 was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The gospel of John's world-turning poetry places Christ at the very beginning of creation, shaping the whole cosmos in the way of love, grace, and truth. Yet, the nearness of God as a baby in a Bethlehem crib feels altogether different - a vulnerable, personal encounter with the Divine that is unlike anything that has happened before.

In this season, we rest in the Love that was present at creation even as we marvel anew that this same love would choose to be known so personally by this world. I am struck by the inclusion of John in this prologue. We know him in John's gospel as simply "a witness." So ordinary, but sent from God for one simple task: "testify to the light."

May this be our vocation, friends, today and always: to bear witness to the light that has come into the world announcing peace, liberation, and mercy for all. Just as God sent John, so has God sent you. Sing with the angels! Marvel with the shepherds! Wonder with Mary and Joseph! And, with John, point always towards the One who makes us One, who blesses this and every city, who makes a home for and among us.

The Rev. John Schwehn

“O Come, All Ye
Faithful” v. 3-4

Sunday, December 24

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
in the highest:

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n!
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing:

Text: attr. John Francis Wade, 1711-1786; tr. Frederick Oakeley

Oh, come to this day with song and prayer in our hearts.

There is a saying, some attribute to St. Augustine, “The one who sings prays twice”. Singing as prayer is kind of subversive.

Choirs singing, singing in exultations offering praise and thanksgiving glorifying God and celebrating the birth of Jesus the Christ.

It is my heart's desire that as choirs are singing the prayers are rising twofold. Prayers for peace and an end to wars twofold. Coming before the throne of Grace to obtain God's mercy for this broken world.

Oh, can you in your Holy imagination see the Words of sung prayers rising before God in glory?

My song for us this advent season is one of Peace, comfort, healing and Joy! Yes, Joy the spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit which comes to us all when we need it most and least expect it.

Oh, come all, ye the faithful, let's sing like our lives depended on it!

The Rev. Babette Chatman

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COVER ART:

Our cover art comes from Augsburg’s Design & Agency studio, where a design team of three students collaboratively explored two primary variables in the creation of this year’s program cover: representation of the city through literal depictions versus abstract imagery, and the differentiation of the three cities (City of David, City of Water, and City of God) within the image using varied compositional techniques.

This image was chosen from a collection of six unique options, each distinct in their combinations of literal and abstract imagery, color, shape, style, and typography.

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