

AUGSBURG UNIVERSITY.

Guide Our Feet into the Way of Peace

Advent 2025

Dear friends,

Advent greetings from the Augsburg University community – our faculty, staff, students, and neighbors. We trust that you and yours are safe and well during this sacred time.

We are pleased once again to publish these Advent devotional reflections by various members of the Augsburg community. This Advent at Augsburg, we are reflecting on the theme of "Guide our Feet into the Way of Peace" - a most urgent prayer for God's faithful people as we seek to live faithfully as peacemakers in a world fraught with the evils of illness, political division, climate disasters, and racial reckoning.

May the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And God's people proclaim together: Alleluia!

Advent Blessings,

Paul C. Pribbenow, Ph.D. President

Monday, December 1

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

The Lord shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.

The Prophet's claim that "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" prompts me to ponder: Where is it that we learn war in the first place, and how will we cease to learn it in the future?

Here we have the gift of our Lutheran Christian faith that acknowledges our paradoxical existence as those sinful and yet also saved.

We learn war everyday in our lives in the world, full of violence and polarization and injustice...even as we know peace in the promise of our awesome and loving God.

And we wait patiently for that remarkable moment when the Advent of our Lord - the promise fulfilled - will shine peace in all the world.

Paul C. Pribbenow, President

When Our Song Says Peace

Tuesday, December 2

When our song says peace and the world says war, we will sing despite the world.
We will trust the song, for we sing of God, who breaks the spear and sword and stills the storm of war.

When our song says free and the world says bound, we will sing despite the world.
We will trust the song, for we sing of God, who opens prison doors and sets the captives free.

When our song says home and the world says lost, we will sing despite the world.

We will trust the song, for we sing of God, who brings us home at last, and gives a song to all.

Richard Leach's *When Our Song Says Peace* sings Isaiah's seemingly impossible promise—they shall beat their swords into plowshares—into a world that keeps choosing war. Set to Thomas Pavlechko's melody, with its movement between F major and D minor, the hymn mirrors the deep dissonance between God's peace and our current political catastrophes. Yet Advent calls us to keep singing.

Leach reminds us that we "sing despite the world"—not from naïveté, but from trust in the God who breaks spears, opens prisons, gathers the lost. Advent hope is active resistance to fear, resistance to division. Advent hope is bearing witness to humanity.

As we light small candles against great darkness, this hymn urges us to join God's counter-melody. What song will you choose this Advent? And who might hear hope because you kept singing?

Lori Brandt Hale

Luke 1:76-79

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 his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The first two chapters of Luke feature God's faithful breaking into spontaneous singing: Mary celebrates her pregnancy with the Magnificat; Zechariah rejoices at the birth of his son, John; angels sing "Gloria" to shepherds working the night shift; the elder Simeon sings of God's promises fulfilled as he holds the infant Jesus. These beautiful words of promise from Luke 1:76-79 are sung by Zechariah. Because he questioned the angel Gabriel's surprising announcement that his wife, Elizabeth, was pregnant, Gabriel struck Zechariah mute until his son John's eventual birth.

In these days of bewilderment, terror, and strife, we respond to any good news with cynicism or apprehension. It would be better to remain silent, to listen, to pray. Or, like those fearful forerunners of Jesus, maybe the only response that could ever live up to the abundant promises of our God isn't speech at all, but song. Whether you join in carols, hymns, or justice songs this season, may you be sung into renewed hope this Advent.

Pastor John Rohde Schwehn

The Road Home, stanzas 1 & 3

Thursday, December 4

Tell me, where is the road I can call my own
That I left, that I lost
So long ago?
All these years I have wandered
Oh, when will I know
There's a way, there's a road
That will lead me home

Rise up, follow me
Come away, is the call
With the love in your heart
As the only song
There is no such beauty
As where you belong
Rise up, follow me
I will lead you home

In a recent choir rehearsal, I misspoke and said "take a stand" rather than "take a seat." We had been rehearsing "The Road Home," and a simple verbal slip became a moment of profound reflection when a student said, "Yeah, take a stand for belonging!"

They were referencing a lyric we had spent a good deal of time reflecting on: "There is no such beauty as where you belong." Our reflections had primarily focused on where we *find* belonging, which makes it somewhat passive, but this student flipped the script. I noticed for the first time how active the third stanza's lyrics are, and that it may be just as much about *making* belonging.

I have always conceived of the third stanza as a divine voice calling to us, but what if it is our voice? Or better yet, what if it is both, and the divine voice is speaking through us? The prophet Micah tells us that God has shown us what is good, and that we are to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

Having seen what is good, we say, "Rise up, follow me...there is no such beauty as where you belong" to the marginalized, threatened, alienated, and lonely, invited all to join us on "The Road Home," or as our theme verse puts it, "The Way of Peace."

Brian De Young

Friday, December 5

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, stanza 1

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king; peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

Joyful, all you nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies; with angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

"Peace on earth, and mercy mild" bring to mind feelings or experiences of calm and comfort, care and compassion. And, yes, those are lovely ways for us to envision all of our days — particularly during this Advent season as we wait and ponder the wonder and joy of our savior's birth. Yet, a world where peace and mercy are abundant and accessible for all requires us to be actively engaged and faithfully committed to the sometimes untidy and often uncomfortable work of peace-building and extending mercy — especially when we feel less than peaceful and merciful. May we continue to boldly proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem", and in that find the light and hope needed to boldly, and with good courage, continue to work towards "peace on earth, and mercy mild."

Cyndi Berg

Saturday, December 6

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

In a sermon entitled "Peace as Rest and as Movement" Joseph Sittler wrote, "The peace of God as rest in God's acceptance of a person is not a knowledge that the world can deliver, is not in act concerned with the world at all. The peace of God as rest, whose gift is to have no anxiety about anything, fulfills itself in a peace of God as movement which goes out with holy concern about everything. This peace matures to turn upon the world with a deep constructive joy, knowing that the peaceless world is precisely the place for working out God's will for truth, justice and beauty."

My prayer for all whose hearts are troubled and who live in fear this Advent season is that you will rest in the gift of God's grace and peace in Christ and that together we will be renewed in God's call to work tirelessly, courageously and even defiantly together for restorative and reparative justice. God's peace be you.

Mark Hanson '68

*The Care of the Earth and other University Sermons" Joseph Sittler, Fortress Press, 1964 p.39

Sunday, December 7

Romero Prayer

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us...

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

The above prayer, by Catholic Bishop Ken Untener, was written in the spirit of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador who was assassinated for his defense of the poor and oppressed. Romero died before his work was done, but he did not lose hope. In one of his final sermons, he asserted, "I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people." He understood, as the prayer notes, "nothing we do is complete... we may never see the result," but he had hope that the work he had begun would live on. This kind of hope is part of the Advent message: that the Prince of Peace will one day bring peace to our troubled hearts and our troubled world. In Advent, we wait, we hope, we believe, even if we do not see it in this moment.

Matt Maruggi

Monday, December 8

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 maiesty 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.

As a a 7-year-old, I could be found near the hi-fi record player singing and dancing to Sandi Patty's *Let there Be Praise*, bursting with joy and attempting to sustain that E flat. This is the sort of enthusiasm Psalm 96 is expressing—the splendor that comes when we reflect on who God is and what God has done for us. In Advent, we celebrate God coming to us, not in thunderous power, but as an infant, inspiring a sense of curiosity. Have you noticed that children express wonder without inhibitions? This season, I invite you to notice the beauty and wonderment in daily life: the laughter of children playing in the snow, the smell of freshly baked cookies, the seasonal music, and the quiet and serene moments when hope feels tangible. Delight in the newness of what God is doing today with childlike wonder and jubilation.

Sarah Erkkinen

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation

These words in the ancient context speak to the end of the Exile in Babylon and the prospect of the return to Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul in Romans 10:15 understands these words in a new context. That new context is found in the life death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul understands Isaiah as proclaiming "good news" for all and the promise of God's ultimate rule of peace.

Prayer: God of Peace, we give you thanks for the proclamation and the ultimate realization of peace.

Philip Quanbeck

Oseh Shalom

Wednesday, December 10

Giver of peace, teach us to see ourselves in the face of the Other, that we may learn to be patient with fault generous with love sparing with anger.

Help us to understand that our little lives are potent with great good, that we are healers in Your image, that reaching out in need of You to others more in need, we find You near.
Give us the grace simply to be kind.
Then peace must surely come to dwell among us.

In these trepid times where fear and hate are so outwardly evident our Lord calls us to bless our neighbors of the world with peace. Peace does not simply mean being sympathetic to the cause of the oppressed, nor standing idly by as we watch wrongdoing; on the contrary it calls us into action. We are called to be active participants in the peace that rules over the earth. As humble servants God has so graciously chosen us to be a part of this peace. It is our duty now as Christ followers to embody the goodness and graciousness of our Savior, Jesus Christ in all we do. As we walk and talk daily with Christ we dive deeper into a life of peace. May this idea of peace consume your thoughts and actions during this Advent season.

Toby Reinsma '24

Thursday, December 11

Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

In this Advent season, Hebrews 1:1–14 invites us to wonder at the mystery of how God comes close. Long ago, God spoke through prophets, offering glimpses of divine hope and presence. But now, in these days, God has spoken most clearly through Jesus—the radiant expression of God's heart and the imprint of God's own being. Advent reminds us that the child we await is not only a teacher or healer, but the One through whom creation came to be, the One who sustains all things with a word of life.

Angels celebrate this Christ, creation responds to this presence, and the reign of Christ is rooted in justice that endures. Yet Jesus arrived in humility, choosing vulnerability so humanity might encounter God's love without fear. As we wait for Christmas and for the healing Christ continues to bring, may our hearts open in expectation. God draws near. Let us listen, welcome, and rejoice.

Megan Moroff Jordan

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, stanza 3

Friday, December 12

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of peace!
Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise each child of earth,
born to give us second birth.

Throughout the Advent season we encounter many titles associated with Jesus. We might hear these texts in worship, in ubiquitous performances of Handel's "Messiah," or even see them on works of art. The third and final stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn jolts us from the incarnational lean focus of the earlier parts of the hymn. From "offspring of a Virgin's womb," "Incarnate deity" and "Emmanuel" we move to the "Sun of Righteousness" bringing life and light, risen with healing in his wings. Healing in his wings. Like the mother hen we hear of in Luke's Gospel. Protecting, nurturing, healing. Yes. Glory to the newborn king!

Mark Sedio '76

Saturday, December 13

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 he is named, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" concludes the Sunday School teacher in my favorite Christmas movie, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever.

One of the young Erdman children responds, "Geez, he'd never get out of 1st grade if he had to learn to write all that down!"

Christians are accustomed to the holy names used to describe Jesus. It can be easy to overlook the more mundane layer of this text. The part that everyone and everything we know has in common with Jesus - we too were given a name. From the very beginning, naming was an act of creation. A name ushers in the identity, held within the bodies of each name-bearer. You too had loved ones who took great care in naming you. Perhaps it was in honor of a family member, or had an important tie to your heritage, maybe it represented an intention your parents wanted to impart to you. Sometimes we find new names, ones we choose because it speaks to who we are. Whenever a name is given (or chosen) it is a way to bless and affirm the truth of our identity.

Wrapped up in the truth of Jesus' identity is a reminder of another name, one we all share. As some dear friends regularly say, "Child of God, you matter." This is what Jesus came here to make known. To remind each of us to hold ourselves - and each person we encounter - as whole and loved. To hold close to the truth of the name we all share, Child of God. And affirm that truth in one another.

Sunday, December 14

Gaudete

Rejoice, Christ is born of the Virgin Mary!

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger; There he lay, the undefiled, to the world a stranger.

Such a babe in such a place, can he be the Savior? Ask the saved of every race who have found his favor.

Son of God of humble birth, beautiful the story! Praise his name in all the earth, hail the King of glory!

English text: Joseph S. Cook (1859–1933)

Rejoice, Christ is born... such a babe in such a place. When was the first time you encountered a relationship that mirrored the way Christ comes to us, a stranger, an infant, holy and new to the world? For me, it was my younger sister, Lauren. She was born in those final days before Christmas, when the world hums with hurry and anticipation, when heaven and earth seem to draw near enough to touch. It is a Christmas I will never forget, seeing this momentary stranger turned sister come home on the eve of Christ's birth. Is not our first encounter with the divine one of a tiny baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger?

This year, I find myself thinking of babies entering a world marked by chaos, strife, and hunger, a world not unlike the one Christ entered. And still, God chooses this world. Still, love takes on lungs and breathes among us. Rejoice, for Christ is born again and again wherever love makes a home.

Deacon Ian Heseltine '21

Monday, December 15

Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ Into the great religions of the world.

We jubilate the precious advent of trust.

We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and Non-Believers, Look heavenward and speak the word aloud. Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud. Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother. Peace, My Sister. Peace, My Soul.

"Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem" by Maya Angelou offers an invitation "to celebrate the promise of peace" and we find according to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 1:20 "For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God." It's in the birth of Jesus Christ that God's promises are fulfilled. This precious advent of trust. This Advent season we speak with our whole heart the word Peace - Shalom!

Siblings, may Advent peace fill our days, our hearts, souls and minds, as we say without shyness or apology or hesitation, we dare to celebrate the Promise of Peace. And we claim God's message of acceptance and love for all humanity and creation for Peace is Holy!

Peace, My Brother; Peace, My Sister; Peace My Soul.

Rev. Babette Chatman '06

Matthew 5:1-9

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

To know peace, you have to become comfortable with darkness. You must wrestle with grief, hunger, hurt. To be human is to experience conflict and loss. Contrary to what the world will tell you, there are blessings in difficult times. God is always present, and what we need is always within us: strength, resilience, gratitude, love. When it is time, the sun will rise again, and with it, clarity. Grief doesn't exist without joy, hunger without abundance. Jesus went to the mountain top to proclaim to all who are suffering - you will receive comfort, you will be filled, you will receive mercy. You are not alone. Now, turn your heart and lend your voice to your suffering neighbor. Remind them - they have not been abandoned. They too are blessed. There is hope despite the challenges. There is light beyond darkness, and always, love. Acknowledge the shadows and move your feet toward your neighbor's light.

Michon True Smith '97

Wednesday, December 17

Luke 1:46b-55

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowly state 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;

indeed, 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 imagination 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 come to the aid of his child Israel.

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

"My soul magnifies the Lord!" What an incredible response to this earth changing news. Mary recognizes the majesty of God and reflects on the significance of this news not only for her but for all generations. Her focus is on God's love for justice, mercy, and compassion. She must have experienced confusion and anxiety about what this would mean for her. How could she explain to her loved ones and community what God had chosen for her? How would they react? But she turns towards God her Savior, trusting the God of her ancestors and the promises God made to Abraham. Her very being magnifies the love of God and God's love for the world. How can we also magnify God's love for our troubled world?

Janice Mayotte Dames

Poetry and Peace: Some Broader Dimensions

Thursday, December 18

Peace as a positive condition of society, not merely as an interim between wars, is something so unknown that it casts no images on the mind's screen...if a poetry of peace is ever to be written, there must first be this stage we are just entering—the poetry of preparation for peace, a poetry of protest, of lament, of praise for the living earth; a poetry that demands justice, renounces violence, reveres mystery.

One person's peace is often another person's oppression. Who gets to determine or decide when peace has been achieved? Is "peace as a positive condition of society" even possible—for every person, every living creature, our soil, our air, and our water? Peace as an interim between destructions might be the best we ever get. The poets and artists are the ones who remind us what peace might look like, feel like, and smell like, so we know when we are in its presence. Our poets are not preparing for something that does not yet exist; their imaginations show us peace right now. Their words are peace written in real time across our protest signs. Their metaphors are the saline-swell behind our eyes in times of lament and praise. Our poets keep mystery alive yet within reach, so the chasm between justice and violence does not swallow us whole. May we all know a shared peace someday. In the interim, may we trust the poets who make peace real today.

Jeremy Myers

Friday, December 19

Ephesians 2:14-18

For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both 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 our God.

It is through Christ that we are able to transcend the dividing walls that humans have established to separate each other. For through Christ we ALL have access to the peace offered in the Spirit of God. This peace puts to death the hostilities that we have exercised amongst each other, it encompasses all of God's creation not limiting itself to those who practice the law. For it reflects the very nature of God's relentless love, a love that cannot be contained. Regardless of your political view, identity, geographic positioning relative to the United States, you are loved by God. Christ reminds us that through the cross we belong to each other, this belonging is not dissuaded by differing denominations, religions, or neighborhoods. For Christ desires all to seek peace and invites us to share this peace with others. What an opportunity we are united in, to embrace peace in the midst of chaotic times. To shine light for the hopeless, comfort those who are mourning, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be peacemakers and share the inheritance of being children of God, thank you.

Jesiah Mason '26

Saturday, December 20

Christ our Lord did not come to bring peace to the world as a kind of spiritual tranquilizer. He brought to his disciples a vocation and a task - to struggle in the world of violence to establish his peace not only in their own hearts but in society itself.

I often associate Advent and Christmas with coziness. The weather in Minnesota is, of course, a big reason why. What's better than curling up at home with a warm beverage as snow is falling outside? But the traditions of Christmas are another reason, too. Whether it's putting up Christmas decorations or making sugar cookies with my family, there's a general feeling of closeness and warmth in my household at this time of year.

We sometimes associate this feeling with peace. Life can slow down a bit, and we can find extra time to relax and reflect. Peaceful, right?

There is value in this peace. It allows us time to connect with others and to rest or practice self-care. But, as Merton reminds us, we also must remember that the peace to which Christ calls us is more than this. Christ's peace is active. It pulls us into the messiness of the world and summons us to the work of justice. Let us remember this calling as we await the Prince of Peace!

John Anderson

Sunday, December 21

O Day of Peace, stanzas 1 & 2

O day of peace that dimly shines through all our hopes and prayers and dreams, guide us to justice, truth, and love, delivered from our selfish schemes. May swords of hate fall from our hands, our hearts from envy find release, till by God's grace our warring world shall see Christ's promised reign of peace.

Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb, nor shall the fierce devour the small; as beasts and cattle calmly graze, a little child shall lead them all.

Then enemies shall learn to love, all creatures find their true accord; the hope of peace shall be fulfilled, for all the earth shall know the Lord.

The day I received my Advent Vesper reading, I googled a YouTube version so I could fully immerse myself into this hymn. The pitch-perfect choir sang these heartfelt lyrics as I gazed at a grass-laden mountain meadow. And, not a word came to me. Nice meadow scene, though.

A week later, persuaded by a friend, I attended a Guided Art as Prayer workshop. Through reflective prayer, scripture meditation and artistic expression, I was invited to quiet my heart, listen to God's voice and respond with visual art. The moment I became still, I was transported back to the meadow hearing "O Day of Peace that Dimly Shines". I experienced a bone-deep sense of peace. It was unexpected and moving. I reached for all of the shades of green to do justice to the meadow and then for all the blues to complete the sky. My artwork was rudimentary and clunky. Experiencing the joy of God's peace was anything but.

Matthew 1:18-25

Monday, December 22

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 pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce 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 become pregnant and give birth to 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 given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Guide our feet into the path of peace – where is peace to be found? What does peace look like? Feel like? Sound and taste and smell like? Our passage from Matthew's Gospel offers some direction.

Where is peace? Right in front of you. For Joseph, peace was choosing Mary, choosing Jesus, choosing God. Stepping into the path of peace meant challenging social norms, risking communal backlash and giving up personal power and respectability.

What does peace look like? Peace looks crazy. Like listening to an angel in your dreams. What does peace sound like? Peace sounds like the angel's words, "do not be afraid". What does peace taste like? Smell like? Our passage in Matthew's Gospel doesn't have these answers. This part of the good news is up to us. Jesus is introduced as Emmanuel in this passage, "which means 'God is with us". Think of a time when you felt God was with you. What were you doing? Where were you? What did it smell like? What did it taste like? That is the sound and taste of peace.

Rev. Gretchen Roeck

Tuesday, December 23

Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

St. Francis prays to be made into an instrument. Instruments are tools, objects that make the master builder's work easier. The instrument is not the finished product, but works with other tools, helping to bring about the final result.

Other types of instruments make music, bringing joy and beauty to the world. One instrument can play solo. But the true magic occurs when instruments of various sizes, shapes, tones, and textures come together to blend and harmonize.

We can work for peace in our world, but individually, we can only accomplish so much. Our collective work toward peace, in a multitude of manners and contexts can only be accomplished when we work together, and pray that God directs our words and actions.

We are instruments, in both senses of the word. It is an honor and a joy to be an instrument of God's peace - shalom, health, health, wholeness, wellbeing. Our cooperation is essential, but God is the maestro of our music, God is the builder of peace.

Ross Murray '00 '09

Wednesday, December 24

In those days a decree went out from Caesar 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 in the guest room.

Now in that same 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!"

Luke 2:1–14 reminds me that God often works through humble beginnings and shows up in unexpected places. Jesus wasn't born in a grand palace or surrounded by power, but in a manger. I found this detail really powerful because it shows that God meets us in ordinary, even messy places, and brings hope right where we are.

The shepherds also stand out in this passage. They were doing their everyday work when the angel came to them first with the news of Jesus' birth. This reminds me that God sees and values people who often get overlooked. The fact that the good news was shared with them first shows that God's love is for everyone, not just the powerful or the privileged. This passage encourages me to seek God in everyday moments and to trust that even when life feels uncertain or imperfect, peace and joy are still possible through God's presence.

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Denise Levertov, from a lecture given in the 1989 Boston University "Celebrating Peace Series". A version of the text is included in Volume II of the Boston University Studies in Philosophy & Religion, published by Notre Dame University Press, 1990. Permission requested.

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