

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a twilight sky. The colors transition from a deep blue at the top to a soft pink and purple near the horizon. A thin, white crescent moon is visible in the center of the sky. The title 'The Story Remembered' is written in a white, elegant cursive font in the upper right corner.

The Story
Remembered

The 43rd Annual Augsburg University Advent Vespers 2022

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Advent Vespers

Devotional 2022

The Story Remembered

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!”

These are anxious times for our world. Pandemics of various sorts – the virus, racial reckoning, economic disruption, horrific war, climate catastrophe, political divide – have all of us longing to know a better way forward. This, then, is just the moment to remember and celebrate the stories about what God is calling us to be and do in the world – 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 2

Luke 1:26-33

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The Story Remembered... God's people have long gathered to remember the unfolding story of God's liberating love for us and for the whole creation. It's a story that began countless generations before Mary and the angel Gabriel: Out of the garden, through the flood, across the Red Sea, into wilderness and exile, among the poor.

The Story Remembered... But on that Annunciation day, this story became re-membered in Mary's womb. Cells are knit together. A child is promised. The same Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation in the very beginning (Gen. 1:2) now begins a brand new thing in her, and the world will never be the same. Jesus is God's story of liberating love with and among us.

The Story Remembered... Within a pandemic, through an Uprising, under the shadow of empire, the story goes on. This community of believers that gathers for Augsburg's Advent Vespers is different today than it was before, and our bodies together re-member God's incarnate love for the whole creation. With Mary, we are perplexed that this story is now ours to bear, but "Do not be afraid, favored one!" God is with you.

The Rev. John Rohde Schwehn

The Annunciation
John O'Donohue

Saturday, December 3

Cast from afar before the stones were born
And rain had rinsed the darkness for colour,
The words have waited for the hunger in her
To become the silence where they could form.

The day's last light frames her by the window,
A young woman with distance in her gaze.
She could never imagine the surprise
That is hovering over her life now.

The sentence awakens like a raven,
Fluttering and dark, opening her heart
To nest the voice that first whispered the earth
From dream into wind, stone, sky and ocean.

She offers to mother the shadow's child;
Her untouched life becoming wild inside.

In Advent we recall how Mary's "untouched life becomes wild," as beautifully phrased by the poet John O'Donohue. And the life within her became wild as well, cutting a jagged path. Forgiving sin. Loving enemies. Dying among thieves. Rising from his tomb. May the Holy Spirit overshadow us with this same wild love and create within us hearts that beat with a fervent hope.

Mark Tranvik

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.”

In the Magnificat, Mary does much more than announce the incarnation. Her words actually lift up the lowly and bring down the proud. When Mary says that God has brought down the powerful and filled the hungry, she challenges those who use power unjustly, and she speaks God’s enacting Word. Martin Luther wrote, “[W]hen God speaks a word, the thing expressed by the word immediately leaps into existence” (LW 13.99). Thus, Mary’s song creates an alternative vision of God’s creation and she calls all people to live into that vision. Mary’s song continues today—not only in churches but also in the streets, where we hear it in the cries, songs, and shouts of those who call for justice and sustainability for all people and creation. These voices don’t merely list grievances. Like Mary, their songs are enactive and bring about liberation as they pursue God’s justice and mercy with their feet, their hands, their hearts, and their songs.

Mary Lowe

The Visitation
John O'Donohue

Monday, December 5

In the morning it takes the mind a while
To find the world again, lost after dream
Has taken the heart to the underworld
To play with the shades of lives not chosen.

She awakens a stranger in her own life,
Her breath loud in the room full of listening.
Taken without touch, her flesh feels the grief
Of belonging to what cannot be seen.

Soon she can no longer bear to be alone.
At dusk she takes the road into the hills.
An anxious moon doubles her among the stone.
A door opens, the older one's eyes fill.

Two women locked in a story of birth.
Each mirrors the secret the other heard.

This poem about Mary visiting Elizabeth, both unexpectedly pregnant, is haunting. We are used to the celebratory telling of this encounter in the first chapter of Luke: Mary greets Elizabeth, the babe in Elizabeth's womb leaps, Elizabeth excitedly proclaims Mary "blessed among women," and "blessed is the fruit of your womb." O'Donohue invites us to look again, to imagine the weight of these unchosen lives. What unchosen paths have shaped your life?

Lori Brandt Hale

Tuesday, December 6

Psalm 139:7-12 [MSG]

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,
You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

I give thanks for a God who boldly created the world. She gazed at a formless void and did not balk. Instead, She peered into the deep with curiosity and love and conjured light, color and life. The truly amazing part of this story is that God did not look upon the void and eradicate its depth, or opacity. No. She peered into the void's fathoms and saw beauty.

Her work began with a sigh. With Her exhale, She breathed life into the opaque motionless waters and awakened them into a churning vibrant source of life. Then She brought the dark layers of the deep into focus by hanging contrasting lights in the sky, and molding colorful land masses and creatures from its dark mysterious pools. Yes, God gazed at an endless abyss and saw the source of life. *Who does that?*

I give thanks for this God who looks at a void and sees life, because this means there is nowhere I can hide from Her love. When I retreat into the deepest, murkiest, heaviest places of my heart (my shame, my doubt, my grief) my Creator is there. And when I am unraveling, scattered and unknown to myself, She sees me and She does not balk. Instead, She exhales. Her holy and loving breath rises and falls in my chest calling me to live in the fullness of who I am. Darkness and light, they're all the same to Her.

Jane Ulring

Come Now, O God ,
verses 1 & 2

Wednesday, December 7

Come now, O God, when our love is forsaken.
Come, when our bedrock of faith has been shaken.
Come, when our deepest of hopes are mistaken.
Come, Emmanuel. Come, Emmanuel.

Come, when we squander the freedom you gave us.
Come, break the systems of sin that enslave us.
Come, though we wonder if you can still save us.
Come, Emmanuel. Come, Emmanuel.

Every human being has had a time when they've felt their deepest hopes were mistaken. A job, friendship, or romantic partnership may collapse at its most promising moment. Hope for successful treatments may be dashed when a terminal diagnosis is given. Beyond private tragedies, many feel they hope in vain for racial justice and economic justice and responsible creation care.

The protagonist in Ann Patchett's novel *State of Wonder* says "Hope is a horrible thing, you know. Hope is like walking around with a fishhook in your mouth and somebody just keeps pulling and pulling it"

When hope is on our terms, hope is indeed a fishhook. But what if we are mistaking our desire to control for hope? Hope on our terms—the job to be exactly as we dreamed, the medical outcome to be what we desire, the solutions to global crises to be quick—is no hope at all. "My power is made perfect in weakness," says Christ, and hope comes to us in a baby from a backwater village whose life will end in public execution. Hope comes when all seems lost, and nothing is ever lost or mistaken because Christ is incarnate and risen.

Brian De Young

Thursday, December 8

Isaiah 11:1-5

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

In Hebrew, Jesse means “God’s gift” or “God exists.” This passage revealed to me that God is inside me and God is growing. That his spirit has roots that are growing deep and branches that are stretching out of me. That as God grows within me so does God’s wisdom, knowledge and understanding naturally flow more potently through me. I feel a presence of deep adoration, a humbleness, and awe. As my relationship with God grows- how I see and hear the world emerges through this relationship. God exists and is emerging in everyone around me; I just need to have the eyes to see. This is sometimes challenging, especially when we live in a chaotic and dissonant world.

I pray that we remember “God works best in chaos” (Walter Brueggeman) and that we daily surrender to that which already lives inside of us. God exists! - That within our relationship with God we grow roots so deep we will be unshakable, branches so wide that we can touch others and they will be empowered, and that we provide shade for those in need of faith and rest.

Geoffrey Gill

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

I've heard this passage described as "pregnant with hope", an apt metaphor for the time of Advent. Terry Fretheim once said, "One should read early Isaiah texts through a veil of tears", a slightly grimmer take. Although seemingly different interpretations, I wonder if these two understandings of this remarkable text aren't simultaneously possible. After all, pregnancy can certainly be fraught with tears! Isaiah speaks here to the familiar human experience of hope in a time of injustice. Hope in such a time might seem ridiculous. How could we even begin to dream of such a world free from fear and violence, when so many have experienced such pain? This vivid image of harmony and interconnectedness flips the way of the world on its head. Although beautiful, it's difficult to comprehend, and is certainly difficult to believe possible.

It seems only right, then, that in this season of Advent God shows up in mysterious ways - choosing the unlikely Mary to bring Jesus Christ into the world and taking on flesh of the least expected among us, a newborn baby. This is such a radical concept, to be a God of vulnerability, not domination. Peace, not destruction. Perhaps it is in the expectancy of and longing for such a future that the deepest of hopes can flourish, as we're reminded in this season that God's abundant love can restructure the very foundations of the world.

Hannah Sackett

Saturday, December 10

Colossians 1:15-20

[Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Environmental degradation is evident all around us. We are on course to increase the planet's temperature by almost 2°F by 2030 which will have devastating results. Our lives are fragile and dependent upon the wellbeing of the planet. During Advent, we not only wait for our own redemption, we also long for the redemption of the entire cosmos. In the fragile, dependent, weak, and defenseless infant Jesus, we come to see the invisible God in God's entire fullness. This is miraculous! But, not only do we find God in the infant Jesus, we also find all things on heaven and on earth. In this infant Jesus, the invisible God is united with the visible and invisible creation. This newborn baby embodies both the divine and the cosmos. In Jesus, that which is considered "not God" is drawn into one body with God. This is a season for telling this story Jesus. But Jesus is not the reason for this season. The redemption of our entire cosmos is the reason for this season.

Jeremy Myers

First Coming
Madeleine L'Engle

Sunday, December 11

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Monday, December 12

Psalm 146:5-9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Bookended by happiness. The book of Psalms begins and ends with happiness. Psalm 1 begins “Happy are those...”. Psalms 146-150 become a unit that lead us into praise: “Hallelujah!” while pointing us to true happiness. True happiness... “involves placing one’s hope in the God of Jacob and relying on that God for help.” (James Limburg, Psalms, Westminster Bible Commentary, p. 495)

Might God want us to be happy? The psalms do not lead us in some search or pursuit of happiness, but rather to our true source of happiness: relying on and trusting in God and God’s activities. God is trustworthy, after all. God is our creator, God is faithful, God completes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoner free, watches over the stranger, upholds the widow and the orphans. That is, God comes to us in our circumstances but never leaves us to the fate of them. This is the story we remember: the God in flesh born for us, a baby in a manger, a king on the cross, the savior of the world. Elsewhere, in the Beatitudes in particular, this word, happy, is translated another way: Blessed.

The Rev. Jeni Grangaard '02

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.'

A few years ago, when I was playing defense during my soccer game, I twisted and heard something in my knee. I knew something was wrong and I hobbled off the field. Luckily it wasn't a tear and was a cyst, but I did need to take time off. With that time off of soccer, I learned more about how to strengthen my knee and the muscles around it, how to listen to my body about what I could do or what needed to wait. I found a new connection with my body that was deeply embodied.

God has given us this beautiful, holy body that so many of us are fearful of. We are taught to be fearful of our own body or certain kinds of bodies or ways to be in our bodies. Advent is a time to notice and listen to our own bodies as God chose to show up with us and among us in a human body through Jesus. By connecting with our bodies we can be reminded who we are and whose we are. With that reminder, we can show up for each other in ways that are rooted and with open hands and hearts for each other.

Ellen Weber

Wednesday, December 14

Isaiah 35:5-7

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

In God there is hope.

My favorite season is spring. Why? Because so much has happened in the wintertime; under the ground life is hibernating, transitioning, and getting ready to spring forward. Even before signs of spring are all around, there is a sense of excitement, possibility, hope. Soon there will be little signs of life popping up through the dark and wet ground, reaching for the sky and new life.

The book of Isaiah is full of both caution and promise. In Isaiah 35:5-7 the prophet foretells the possibility of what happens when the promises of God are revealed. As humans, we forget and do not always believe it, we are caught up in the hurt and pain that keeps our eyes covered and our ears closed. Yet - there is a breakthrough from winter to spring, a possibility that brings hope to the dry deserts and sight to those who have lost their way. We are reminded of the miracles of God, and there are so many metaphors for our lives in the present day.

In God there is hope.

Adrienne Eldridge

Jesus didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it. Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

This translation of Romans comes from the Message bible. I love how it dives into a deeper explanation of this text. It prompted me to reflect on things in my life that correspond with this verse.

First - the therapeutic nature of music. I am a third year music therapy major which means that I am building my life around the virtue of placing myself near the troubles of others. My profession is built around caring for others more than myself, in a healthy manner. With that being said I will "take on the troubles of the troubled."

Second - the calling and the waiting. We never know what God is going to do next, but all we can do is have hope. Hope has always had a very special meaning to me. Whenever I hear that word, it reminds me of something I once read: "H.O.P.E. Hold On, Pain Ends." No matter how long we wait, everything will be okay in the end.

Regardless of what God calls us to do, we will sing in harmony with not only our voices but our lives as well. Our song can be one of hope because God promises to be with us in our professions, our joys and our troubles.

Friday, December 16

Angels We Have Heard On High, vs. 1-2

Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.

Gloria in excelsis Deo;
gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heav'nly song?

“Angels We Have Heard on High” reminds me of going to church on Christmas Eve and celebrating the birth of Jesus with my friends and family. These first two verses show us that we should celebrate the birth of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and how delighted everyone should be. The first verse represents the angels singing about his birth and how excited they are. I think that at the time when Jesus was born, people were confused as to why shepherds were celebrating and singing, as we see in verse two. This song just adds to the joys of Christmas. We should join in with the angels and shepherds and proclaim the birth of Jesus! It is a great time to get together with loved ones and celebrate.

Nadine Miller '23

Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

Isaiah's words are to King Ahaz in Jerusalem. Ahaz is a ruler who neglects God and makes idolatrous choices that gravely endanger his people. Isaiah utters these words to him from within the context of an unstable time - the powerful take as they desire, the poor become pawns of the wealthy, threats of violence persist from outside nations, there is a loss of faith in God and distrust of one another, injustice rules the day. Sound familiar?

Despite the dire circumstances...the seed of God's promise is given. In our Christian story this seed is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Immanuel. God With Us. It is a bold promise to speak into corrupt and oppressive realities. Jesus' time, like Isaiah's, and like ours, was deeply troubled. Yet none of this deters the promise of God from entering the world. Not in Isaiah's time, not in Jesus' time, and not in ours either.

The promise is for Immanuel. God with us. All of us.
May this seed take root in our bodies, our neighborhoods and all of creation.
May we embrace and participate in the new life this promise offers.

Kristina Frugé

But just when [Joseph] had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

Joseph, realizing his betrothed was pregnant, had just resolved to separate from Mary quietly. As the gospel writer notes, he was a "righteous man" and he also had a sense of honor. But then things changed. The lengthy genealogy with which Matthew's gospel begins put Joseph in the line of Abraham to David to Joseph. But an angel speaking in a dream changes everything. Take Mary as your wife and name the child "Jesus" is the word from the angel. Don't be afraid to do the task to which God is calling you, the angel's message.

The Greek name Jesus is the equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, the successor to Moses. Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. It is Joshua, Jesus in the Greek of the Septuagint, who leads the Israelites into the Promised Land. Other names and titles will be added to the name Jesus to explain the life and work of this child. Emmanuel or "God with us" is the first in Matthew's gospel. Other titles and names will come such as rabbi, teacher, healer, son of David, Son of Man, Son of God, Savior, Messiah. And not to be forgotten, the suffix "of Nazareth."

Joseph puts his personal notion of righteousness aside and does the right thing. He named the child Jesus.

Phil Quanbeck II

Isaiah 9:6

Monday, December 19

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Whenever I read or hear these words, I think of the beautiful way they were set to music in Handel's Messiah. When this passage is sung, the final names are rendered with a joyous exuberance—Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The final name is given particular emphasis which and seems fitting to highlight in this season, in our tumultuous world. It reminds me that if we are to emulate Jesus, we must be bearers of peace in our lives and in the life of our local and global communities. The peace is not a quietist peace that turns inward for one's own benefit, but rather one that does justice and can therefore create true reconciliation in our individual lives and in our fractured world.

Matthew Maruggi

Tuesday, December 20

Joy to the World, vs. 1-2

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

What is joy? To me, joy means being in community with others, laughing, having fun, being in nature, and just being myself. I hear joy coming through in the phrases and imagery “heav’n and nature sing”, “fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains” and “repeat the sounding joy”.

Community, coming together and singing are all things that we’ve had to give up these last few years. What does it look like to come back together and make a joyful noise?

Renee Christensen '23

The Season of Remembrance

Howard Thurman

Wednesday, December 21

Again and again, it comes:

The Time of Recollection,

The Season of Remembrance.

Empty vessels of hope fill up again;

Forgotten treasures of dreams reclaim their place;

Long-lost memories come trooping back to me.

This is my season of remembrance,

My time of recollection.

Into the challenge of my anguish

I throw the strength of all my hope:

I match the darts of my despair with the treasures of my dreams;

Upon the current of my heart

I float the burdens of the years;

I challenge the mind of death with my love of life.

Such to me is the Time of Recollection,

The season of Remembrance

At times, I recall how long the past years have seemed. The way we used to prepare and plan. This Season of Remembrance brings me back to the image of the Advent candle wreath. Symbols of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. I recall the memories of watching the lighting of the candle week, by week, by week until time for the Children's Christmas Pageant. I remember the promises, the flames, the amber of Hope, Peace, Love and Joy.

My prayer for this Season of Remembering, and of Promise is that you: "Listen to the long stillness: New life is stirring New dreams are on the wing New hopes are being readied: Humankind is fashioning a new heart Humankind is forging a new mind God is at work." (Howard Thurman from the "Mood of Christmas")

The Rev. Babette Chatman '06

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Time God Was Born into The World

“In those days...while Quirinius was governor...” Luke’s story of the birth of Jesus is oddly, wonderfully specific. The birth of Jesus happened long before 1582 when Pope Gregory XVIII updated the calendar introduced by Julius Caesar more than four decades before Jesus was born. But Luke’s gospel doesn’t want to bother us with calendar dates. Instead we’re invited to recall the time of the first empire-wide census, when Augustus was Caesar in Rome, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Alas, scholars differ as to which year that was exactly. In fact, you can go down more than a few internet rabbit holes about that “first registration” that Luke says sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. But whatever the year, what really matters—calendar-wise, incarnation-wise—is this: “The time came for Mary to deliver her child.”

Hans Wiersma

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Many times in the New Testament, Jesus Christ refers to himself as a shepherd. In Jesus’ time shepherds were held in low esteem in society. They were often tasked with tending to their flocks outside the city. Occupying the fringes of society. Why then would the good news of the Christ child make itself known to them first? The news of a baby so precious and worthy of attention should be given to a group that has the resources to give it the proper care and respect it deserves. The shepherds didn’t have much of anything to give to Jesus in return for the gift he had given them. The beauty of this news however is that God doesn’t require from us rich worldly wealth. He requires only a humble heart ready to serve. God’s invitation extends to all people, but especially those on the margins. Christ has anointed us, his followers, to bring this good news to those on the fringes just as the Angels did so many years ago.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The familiarity of the story of Jesus birth does not diminish the provocative questions it raises for us:

- Where and to whom do we go with haste to be met by Jesus today? The way of Jesus takes us to those who are marginalized, oppressed and discarded by dehumanizing and excluding systems. Together we are called to embody God's justice establishing, peace building, creation caring, neighbor serving, self honoring love.
- What are we making known about Jesus that leaves people amazed?
- Do we unashamedly declare in word and deed this Jesus is God's love in the flesh for you, for me and the whole creation?
- What are we pondering and treasuring in our hearts?
- How can we possibly keep silent when with the shepherds our hearts and voices are filled with praise and thanks to God for the gift of God's liberating grace in Christ Jesus?

Luke 2:28-32

Sunday, December 25

Simeon took [the baby Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying,

‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.’

On this most holy of mornings, we stand with Simeon as those whose eyes have seen God’s salvation, and we, too, are dismissed in peace to live in what the poet W.H. Auden has called “the time being.” And how shall we live, but as those who proclaim hope in the face of anxiety, love in the face of hate, faith in the face of doubt, light in the face of darkness? May it be ever so.

Paul C. Pribbenow

“Angels We Have Heard on High,” Text: French Carol; Tr. H.F. Hemy, *The Crown of Jesus Music*, 1864.

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