

2020

# ADVENT

*Volunteer Reflections  
on the Advent Gospels*



*Social Justice | Simple Living  
Community | Spirituality*



# WELCOME!

***"...we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." (Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7)***

**Greetings!** We hope you are doing well amidst all that is happening in our world.

Thank you for checking out this year's **Advent Reflection Guide**, brought to you by *Catholic Volunteer Network* and *Catholic Apostolate Center*. This Guide is both an invitation to reflect with us, as well as an invitation to learn about us.

In these pages, you will find original reflections, prayers, and service suggestions from current and former volunteers in our network who have served throughout the U.S. and around the world. Advent is always a special time to ask our volunteers to reflect – this year even more so.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, volunteers continue to serve in full-time in ministry placements ranging from education to social services to parish outreach. These ministries have often looked different in 2020, as volunteers have adjusted to service sites that have gone partially or fully remote. Other volunteers, like those serving in healthcare placements, have joined frontline workers in their daily efforts to keep communities healthy during COVID-19.

We are so grateful for the women and men who have answered the call to service this uncertain year. Their faith and persistence give us great hope. Their commitment to social justice and racial justice inspires us. By offering their gifts, these volunteers have embodied the words of Isaiah the Prophet in the First Sunday of Advent readings (Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7): "...we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands."

We hope these reflections may help your own spiritual journey as we wait and watch for Christ this Advent season.

Peace be with you!

**Catholic Apostolate Center & Catholic Volunteer Network**

## LOOKING FOR MORE?

Catholic Apostolate Center hosts an extensive library of Advent resources on their website: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/advent-resources.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/advent-resources.html)



**Catholic Apostolate Center**  
Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles

# REFLECTION

By **Colleen Campbell**, Echo Graduate Service Program;  
Catholic Apostolate Center



***Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:33-37)***

**In this week's Gospel**, we hear Jesus encouraging us to "Be watchful! Be alert!" in waiting for the coming of the Reign of God. Jesus uses the image of a homeowner who first secures his home and belongings before leaving to take a trip. Because his travels take him far from his property, the homeowner is intentional about ensuring that his own property is in order before setting out for a new road and destination. We might imagine the factors that would drive his painstakingly detailed preparations: extra security to protect his home from thieves, people to check on the resources of the house to make sure that it doesn't flood or become too drafty without anyone inhabiting it, and perhaps also to achieve a sense of his own inner peace, that he has taken an active role in protecting his property.

Jesus' parable reminds us of the importance of securing our own "inner" home and taking an active role in preparing ourselves for our own journeys in life. For me, this parable brings to mind the importance of engaging in our own formation. During my time as an apprentice catechetical leader as part of the University of Notre Dame's Echo Faith Formation Leadership Program, I was introduced to the hard work of formation. Formation is the intentional cultivation of our spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral qualities as human beings that allows us to live out our call to holiness in a generous and healthy way in ministry. In Echo, I entered the world of professional ministry for the first time. I learned quickly that ministry calls us to give deeply of ourselves; however, in being new to ministry, I neglected to secure my own "inner home" of my mind, heart, body, and soul before journeying out of myself to encounter others in the work of evangelization and catechesis. I was susceptible to the outside thieves of comparison, results-driven ministry, and how I could best show off my training and theological knowledge to those I served. In order to make an offering of my own life in ministry that truly served the coming of the reign of God and did not depend on my own efforts or ego, I had to learn to engage my own formation. I intentionally cultivated a life of prayer, took care in applying my studies in catechesis and ministry to my work, and reflected and healed through a relationship with a therapist. Over time, I felt revitalized and more able to cooperate with the Spirit's work in my life and ministry because I was no longer focused on just trying to survive.

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

In the Christian life, we are called to accompany others in the life of faith. A relationship of accompaniment is a perfect setting for formation; it allows us to lean on and learn from each other how best to imitate Jesus in our life. Is there someone in your own life, especially in difficult circumstances, who you might intentionally accompany this Advent? How can you help them secure their own "inner" house on the journey of faith through walking with them in solidarity, mutuality, and listening?

## Focus: SPIRITUALITY

By failing at trying to minister based on my own efforts to be the most knowledgeable and most available to those I served, I learned that with the help of the Holy Spirit, I had to engage my own formation so I could be awake, alert, and ready to make of myself a healthy and holy offering. Through formation, I grew to become a minister with her house in order while being on the journey of faith and ministry, prepared to meet Jesus in those I served "whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning." How can you aim to put your own inner house in order this Advent? Are there spaces in your life where you can engage in your own formation in order to make a more generous and healthy offering of your life?

## PRAYER

*God, Isaiah speaks out "Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." We remember that our lives are the spaces where our salvation unfolds, where we are formed and shaped into art by you, the Artist of Artists. Send your Spirit upon us to be moved by those you place in our path so we may be formed in compassion, empathy, and solidarity. Strengthen us to take an active role in shaping our world to be a reflection of your infinite love through the witness of our lives. Amen.*



# REFLECTION

By **Mike McCormick**, Augustinian Volunteers;  
Catholic Volunteer Network

***Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;  
he will prepare your way. (Mark 1:1-8)***



**Today's reading** begins with the words of the Prophet Isaiah – *“Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.”*

If there was ever a year I wished God would send a messenger to guide me, this is certainly it. 2020 has been a challenge in all the wrong ways. Many straight paths have become twisted roads. Sometimes it feels like there aren't roads at all – and that I'm simply trekking through wilderness.

Like many, I feel lost. And while being lost is a scary feeling, maybe it's also the best place to begin finding ourselves. After all, today's story is not only about John the Baptist, but also about the people of Judea and the residents of Jerusalem who go out to him in the desert.

Those people left the cities behind to risk a journey into the wild – where instead of danger, they found baptism, reconciliation, and hope (“One mightier than I is coming...”). This model encourages me to make a similar “journey” through prayer these next few weeks – even if I do not physically get away from Washington, DC, where I currently live.

Looking back, my own service year in 2014-2015 felt very much like a journey into the wild – one which I am still processing. I can only imagine what this journey must feel like in 2020. For all those serving now, please take heart and know that this community of volunteers and alumni holds you close in prayer!

You are the people who have risked the journey. You are the people helping straighten twisted paths. You are loved and appreciated. Do not be afraid.

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Advent season, many people are facing food insecurity. My service suggestion is to donate within your means to your local food bank or local food drives. If you are unable to drop off donations in person, there may be opportunities to give financially to churches and nonprofits who are organizing food runs and home deliveries during this pandemic. Consider searching online or asking your neighbors for leads on who is organizing!

## Focus: COMMUNITY

John the Baptist's call to baptism and forgiveness of sin is not just about one person. It is about the whole community journeying and repenting together. Can you imagine what this would look like in our world today? It is hard to picture – but I can imagine it would be a joyful occasion. As individuals, we could celebrate our freedom and renewal of heart. As a community, we could clearly see and transform the biases and harmful dynamics that keep us from loving and valuing every person.

## PRAYER

*God, we give thanks for the clear paths and the broken ones. Help us navigate the roads ahead. Help us not to feel alone. Help us to love and nourish those who journey with us. And help us to extend love and kindness to the strangers we may meet along the way. To you we journey. Amen.*



# REFLECTION

By **Monica Thom Konschnik**, Jesuit Volunteer Corps; Catholic Apostolate Center; Catholic Volunteer Network Board Chair

*A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (John 1:6-8)*



**This has been a year of waiting.** Waiting for the pandemic to end. Waiting for results of a COVID test. Waiting to figure out if and when we can go back to work. Waiting to see our friends and family. Waiting for our sourdough starter to be ready to bake. Waiting to celebrate important life events. Waiting to have a graduation or to get married. Waiting to memorialize a loved one who has died. Waiting for a vaccine. Waiting for everything to go back to how things were before the pandemic hit.

And here we are, this Advent season, waiting.

Waiting and preparing for the coming of Christ at Christmas. Waiting, as John the Baptist did in the Gospel. He knew what was coming; he knew that Christ was going to follow him.

Our waiting for Christ is a hopeful waiting. A joyful waiting. While we do not know when the pandemic will end, we know that Christ will come to us at Christmas and we know that Christ will come for us at the end of time. We should relish in that joyful waiting while we continue to wait for some semblance of normalcy to return to our daily lives by finding moments of light, of peace, and of personal growth.

# SERVICE SUGGESTION

This week, I challenge all of us (myself, included) to focus your energy of service on yourself in an act of self-care. Self-care is not selfish behavior. It is a way, especially during these trying times, to be able to put our best selves out into the world, to our families, to our friends, to our colleagues, and to those who serve. Take a few moments this week to do an activity that brings you joy, that allows you to appreciate this season of waiting and all of the beauty that comes with that.

# PRAYER

*Good and gracious God, we know you are with us in our waiting. Help us to be patient in our time of waiting. Help us to trust in you and your great plan for our lives. Help us to find joy in our time of waiting, both in Advent and in the current world situation. Help us to find peace in our time of waiting when it becomes too much to handle or is overwhelming. Amen.*

# Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

This Gospel encourages us to look beyond the current situation to what is to come. In the current pandemic, we are called to do something for those around us and for our world. We can do acts of charity by wearing a mask, social distancing, staying home when we can, picking up groceries for an elderly neighbor, making dinner for someone who is sick, reaching out to a healthcare worker we may know to see how we can help them, and supporting local business.



# REFLECTION

By **Madeline McKissick**, Franciscan Mission Service



***Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (Luke 1:26-38)***

**We long to know God's plan for our lives.** We dream of the day when God reveals his plan to us, romanticizing the dramatic call and our brave "yes." These dreams come from our desires to be chosen and wanted. We need to know that we have a purpose, and we're anxious to find out what it is.

Even before the Annunciation, Mary knew that God had a plan for her. In her patience and gentleness, Mary trusted in the Lord's perfect timing. She probably never expected that he would reveal his will through an angel, and she probably never dreamed of being the Mother of God. Regardless, Mary didn't just say yes, she said "let it be done," or in Latin, "fiat." She accepted God's plan for her completely, wholeheartedly, and without reserving anything.

Mary conformed her will with God's will. She wanted what he wanted. When God calls us, this is how we should respond. God gave us the gift of free will so that we can say yes out of love for him. As the most perfect Saint, disciple, and missionary, Mary said yes to God in all things. She always followed his will perfectly, and we can look to her as we say yes to him in big and little ways.

Like Mary, we might be scared or confused when God asks something of us, but we can emulate our Blessed Mother by saying "let it be done."

## SERVICE SUGGESTION

When we get serious about living simply, we should downsize. My service suggestion for you this week is to donate. If you have five hoodies but only need three, then give two away. Instead of getting coffee every morning before work, donate your coffee money to a nonprofit or a charity. When we have more room for God, we also have more clarity to recognize the needs of our brothers and sisters. In our pursuit of simple living, we can meet the needs of our neighbors through noticing and fulfilling their needs.

## Focus: SIMPLE LIVING

It's difficult to hear God calling us when we're preoccupied by what we own. Attachment to our possessions and wealth distracts us from God and our relationship with him. Fortunately, we can avoid this by committing to simple living. As we take on simple living and empty our lives of clutter, we have more space for God. When we're feeling empty, instead of wanting more stuff, we can be like Mary and seek the Lord. This way, like our Blessed Mother, we can remain open to God so that we can listen to and be receptive of his plans for us.

## PRAYER

Dear God,

*I believe that you have good and beautiful plans for my life. I trust that you have chosen me for a purpose, a mission, and a service that only I can do because you have made me unique and unrepeatable in your image and likeness. I humbly ask you to give me the grace to say yes to you. Please help me to want what you want and give me the patience to trust in your timing. In all things, let me choose you. Give me the grace to allow your will, not mine, to be done. Amen.*





# REFLECTION

By **Jocelyn A. Sideco**, Jesuit Volunteer Corps;  
Catholic Volunteer Network

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:14)*

## Merry Christmas!

We may have expected the re-telling of Jesus’ birth from Matthew or Luke’s Gospels. Instead, we contemplate God’s origin story through the poetic, lyrical prose of John.

Today we consider a new beginning, a moment when “God so loved the world that God sent us his only son.” This break-through pierces our linear understanding and accounting of the world’s story filled with pain, suffering, triumph, and defeat. God’s mercy is revealed in a loveable, cuddle-able newborn baby whose limits far outweigh his ability to be independent and to govern with clarity.

How clever, indeed is our God! It’s obvious. Babies have a way of re-focusing, re-purposing, re-organizing the ways we live, the ways we speak, the ways we allow ourselves to practice love and care. My newborn child is 4 months old and she is large and in charge! I may think my day revolves around my work, my desires, my needs, but her very existence draws me to her in ways that allow me to be softer, more present, more appreciative and grateful, more curious, more sensitive. I am taken by the drama of her cry for food, a diaper change or a nap. She reorientates my day’s disappointments with a coo and a laugh. And my day’s victories are short-lived until the next cry.

Our God chose to reveal God’s self... God who has always been and continues to be... as tender, dramatic, and reorienting as a newborn child. Our God’s love can be as fragile as a baby’s breath. But that fragility is not weakness or strength. Instead, that fragility is real, demands attention, demands a response and an action from us.

# SERVICE SUGGESTION

Don’t think. Don’t buy. Don’t get stuck in despair. Don’t disengage. Find a child to watch, to hold, to listen to. Do this with another person or a small gaggle of friends. Bring that experience of tenderness and amusement to a local shelter, food pantry, street corner or Zoom Room. Bring that experience of attentiveness and willingness to live into joy to the next time you talk with someone you have lost patience for. Commit to serving the child in others, everyday, in every situation you find yourself in.

# Focus: SPIRITUALITY

Living in a community that explicitly created room to name and grow in our own practices of Spirituality gave me the courage to explore my faith and theirs, too. I am grateful for the gift of courage to explore many images of God.

Does John’s account of the beginning awaken a different experience of God? Have you ever prayed to the baby Jesus? Have you ever pretended to be a follower of John the Baptist just to imagine what kind of person you would be or what kind of person John would have to be? My practice of Spirituality grew wide and deep while intentionally being of service.

What new or different way of praying is God calling you to explore this Christmas?

# PRAYER

*Loving and Gracious God, on this Christmas Day we thank you for the gift of your child, a human being in every way (except sin) like us! May Jesus’ shining light draw our own light out of ourselves so that we may stand squarely in the truth of who, whose, and where we are.*

*We pray that we might grow in courage, like John the Baptist, to be so convinced of Your goodness that our testimony of Your love does not promote neutrality, but rather an accompaniment, an affection for those most vulnerable around us. We ask all this, through Your little, baby son whose life gives meaning and purpose to ours. Amen.*



# ABOUT US:



**Catholic Apostolate Center**

Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles

**The Catholic Apostolate Center**, a ministry of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines) - Immaculate Conception Province, was founded in 2011 to respond to the needs of the Church through: Developing, in collaboration with dioceses and other institutions and organizations, formation programs for the New Evangelization; Assisting Catholic leaders in deepening collaboration with one another; Providing formation and apostolic opportunities for members and collaborators of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. The Center takes its inspiration from the spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti and achieves its goals through hosting conferences, seminars, webinars, and presentations as well as providing online and print resources.

*For more information visit: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org)*



**Catholic Volunteer Network** is a national membership organization of Christian volunteer and mission programs that fosters and promotes full-time national and international service opportunities for people of all backgrounds, ages and skills. Catholic Volunteer Network supports and enhances the work of its membership by providing training and resources, networking opportunities, and national advocacy.

*For more information visit: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org)*

