



Advent

2018



SOCIAL JUSTICE



SIMPLE LIVING



COMMUNITY



SPIRITUALITY

Volunteer Reflections
on the Advent Gospels



WELCOME!

Thank you for reading this year's Advent Reflection Guide, brought to you by **Catholic Apostolate Center** and **Catholic Volunteer Network**. This Guide contains Gospel reflections written by current and former volunteers, framed around the four pillars of faith-based service: Social Justice, Simple Living, Community, and Spiritual Growth. Each year, these reflections are shared with our community of volunteers serving the U.S. and around the world, former volunteers, prospective volunteers, and other friends and supporters .



As we approach this holy season of Advent, our unofficial theme is gratitude. In these times which are seemingly marked by powerful messages of intolerance, xenophobia, and violence, our volunteers and the programs they serve with give us hope and remind us of the ways in which God is active and at work in our communities. Last year, more than 28,000 people served with over 185 CVN volunteer programs, working in diverse fields including church ministry, education, health services, immigration services, social services, and many others. We are grateful for the courage these volunteers and lay missionaries demonstrate, often travelling far from home to serve in unfamiliar cities, isolated rural communities, and foreign countries.

In the Second Sunday of Advent, we read of John the Baptist and his message, inspired by the prophet Isaiah – “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” We are immeasurably thankful for all of our volunteers, past and present, each working in their own ways to make straight the parts of the path that have been neglected.

Thank you once more for beginning this journey with us. Whether you are a prospective, current, or former volunteer, a staff member of a volunteer program, or simply a friend and supporter of the Catholic Apostolate Center or Catholic Volunteer Network, we pray that these reflections will inspire your own contemplation and transformation as you prepare for the Christmas season.

Sincerely,

Catholic Apostolate Center & Catholic Volunteer Network

LOOKING FOR MORE?

Looking for more inspiration? Catholic Apostolate Center hosts an extensive library of Advent resources on their website: www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/advent-resources.html



Catholic Apostolate Center
Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles

REFLECTION

By **Mara Scarbrough**, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

"Be vigilant at all times." - Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

As we prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus this Advent season, today's

Gospel reading challenges us to also prepare our hearts for the return of the Son of Man. In our current world it can be so easy to get caught up in the busyness of the season, or the superficial obligations that seem like requirements. Jesus challenges this idea with conviction, cautioning His disciples to live so that they will not be caught unprepared for His return.

In the Bon Secours volunteer program our service is focused on a "Ministry of Presence". This is a fancy way of saying that we are challenged to serve by "being", rather than "doing". It is a radical way of loving others well with a focus on intentional encounters that lead to an authentic connection with others and Christ. When we open our hearts to Jesus, our aim in interactions changes. The Lord has called us to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, especially our marginalized counterparts.

It can be easy to allow our hearts to grow numb to the pain and suffering in the world, especially if we are living in a way that is not mindful of the Gospel. The Advent season offers us a time to pause and examine our lives. As we prepare our hearts for Him, we are called to slow down and focus on the parts of our lives that strengthen our connection to God.



PRAYER

Come Lord Jesus, and settle into our hearts this Advent Season. Help us to seek You more each day in our service, in our homes, and in our souls. Help ignite in us fervor to serve You with joyfulness.

Lord, we ask that You help us live vigilantly, working each day to recognize the light of Christ in every interaction we have. Help us slow down so we may intentionally seek You in every encounter. Bless our bodies for Your service and our service for Your glory.

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

As we celebrate the first week of Advent, the Gospel compels us to live mindfully. As Jesus commands the disciples to live vigilantly, he calls us to live with intentionality. It can be so easy to let our own anxieties or activities overwhelm us. When we live wrapped up in our own problems, we turn a blind eye to the suffering of others and miss the rich opportunities the Lord provides to encounter His love in all people. Social Justice calls us to encounter others in a radically intentional way. Living for the Gospel allows us to love in the way that God intended.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

As we start this Advent season, we are all challenged to slow down and look for Christ in our world. In the second reading we implore the Lord to increase our love for one another. A way to spread love in your community can be to pick up trash in your neighborhood. This small act displays our care for God's creation and communicates our respect for those with whom we live. As you serve your neighbors in this way, actively name and notice the unique parts of your community that the Lord has provided. Take the time to thank God for the gift of His creation, which He generously invites us to participate in.



REFLECTION

By **Kevin Ruano**, Franciscan Mission Service DC Service Corps

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." - Luke 3:1-6

Advent
Week Two

Isaiah, whose words the evangelist Luke repeats in this week's Gospel,

prophesized a beautifully uncanny world. According to the prophet's vision, no valley would be too deep, no mountain or hill too high, no road too long or path too rough for God's salvation to reach. When we understand this word, we recognize that the saving presence of God has no limitation. God's revelation arrives everywhere and to all life wherever it may be. No one life stands below or above another in that radically horizontal and unfamiliar world. God disregards human hierarchies, borders, and definitions.

This season, we celebrate, meditate upon, and commit ourselves to our world's greatest mystery—God incarnate and among us in Christ. Just like those along the Jordan who were invited by John the Baptist, we are invited to work for the world to which Christ, the salvation of God, arrived. The world in which we recognize God is with us and in each one of us. The world whose mystery we know capable to reveal itself anywhere and at any moment of the day. The world in which each person enters in community without prejudice or judgement but with mutual respect because we know every person to be equally chosen and beloved by God.

Focus: SIMPLE LIVING

When I reflect on what prevents us from treating each other as kin and caring for each other and our common home, indifference appears as our greatest challenge. Today our politicians run campaigns based on hatred, prejudice, and the blatant disrespect of other cultures.

Today so many of us deny scientific facts and disregard how our planet is suffering while we choose to continue to live numb and blind. Preoccupied primarily by our economic wellbeing, we tolerate injustice and accept apathy. Simple living this Advent must mean making space for God and others in our hearts by ridding our lives of the material goods which make us apathetic to and complicit in others' suffering.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Opening our hearts to the arrival of God begins with an honest reflection on what in our lives encourages our cultural indifference to the suffering of our planet and its most marginalized peoples. This Advent, think of the moral demands of our faith and analyze whether your life habits or practices adequately demonstrate your commitment to God, all God's people, and all God's creation. What will you do to reflect more of the light of Christ today?

PRAYER

Just and compassionate God, whose incarnate word reveals itself to the tender and humble hearted, we pray for healing from the hurtful divisions that human hierarchies, borders, and definitions impose.

Send your Spirit to renew a world divided and suffering. May bigotry shake in the path of Your love and prejudice fade in Your understanding presence.

You, good guardian, know each one of us to be Your chosen and beloved. Bless and protect us as we work for reconciliation, peace, and justice.



REFLECTION

By **Melissa Cedillo**, Loretto Volunteers

"I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals."
- Luke 3:10-18



The *third* Sunday of Advent is often marked by the theme of faithfulness.

Specifically, in Luke's Gospel, we are called to be faithful to God's basic creation, the Earth. This reading begins in similar way that most prayers start, "What should we do?" or even more simply, "How can we be faithful?"

John the Baptist responds by telling people to shed themselves of excess in order for all to have what they need. While objects like coats, food, wages, and taxes help to live a dignified life, there is something significant in remembering that our bodies also desire the natural gifts of God. Towards the end of this reading, Christ is named for the first time. It is also here that the elements water and fire, and the harvest items of wheat and chaff, are introduced.

Remembering Christ as water and fire, and reading of wheat and chaff, reminds me of the power of being connected to creation. Finding God's presence in the smell of fresh white flowers or hearing God's humor through my housemate's laugh. Returning to the question, "What should we do?" the answer may simply be to turn outwards - to what has been made pure.

PRAYER

Advent translates to "coming". While we each prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the end of the year, and the beginning of a new year, may we pray: For those who make up our own communities, that we may nourish each other.

For those who accompany us in our day-to-day lives, that we may see God's gifts in them. For our natural Earth, that we may tend to it with love and care. For one another, that we may use our God-given gifts to lift each other up.

Focus: COMMUNITY

Most frequently, when I turn myself outwards, it is usually towards my volunteer community. My community consists of four beautiful women. For me, these women are the most organic examples of creation and kinship. I desire their support while I discern my future. I long for their companionship. They replenish me after a long day. Each woman is unique, one offers a warm embrace every night, one fills me with joy, one teaches me compassion, and one shows me grace. They each illuminate the natural gifts God has blessed them with.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

I invite you to turn outwards. Plan to spend intentional time with your community. Acknowledge each other and affirm the natural gifts that each member holds. Ask - what parts of nature are surrounding you? How can you take better care of them? It is a simple act of being present, but it is in doing so that we can sit and enjoy creation while we wait for the coming of Christ.



REFLECTION

By **Liz Fairchild**, Holy Family Service Corps

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." - Luke 1:39-45

Advent
Week Four

In this week's Gospel, we accompany Mary going to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, and hear of the joy this visit brought to Elizabeth and her unborn son.

This passage reminds me of one particular occasion during my volunteer year, while I was serving in a childcare center. It was a morning like every other morning in our preschool room, and then, one of my students came in with a huge smile on her face and gave me a hug saying, "My mommy is going to have a baby soon."

Before lunchtime, she had told the entire preschool class and all of the teachers in our room. Before the week was done, every child in the center knew that Leah was going to be a big sister. In both the Gospel reading and in my service year, I experienced this kind of joy, whether it was sharing the joy of Christ while serving within my community or experiencing joy within my own daily life.

Focus On: SPIRITUALITY

When I think of spiritual growth in relation to the Gospel today, it drives home the point that if I can spread joy to just one person, then that person in turn can spread it to another - and soon my joy becomes infectious.

Many times this sharing encourages people to share themselves, in a way they may not have known they were able to. Many of my preschool students would respond to my happy news with news of their own. These exchanges allowed me to become more aware of my students and the ways I can better help them reach their potential.

PRAYER

*Lord, You have given me so much.
You have given me joy in the midst
of sorrow.*

*You have given me light in the
midst of darkness.*

*Help me to share Your joy and Your
light with all whom I encounter.*

Amen.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

If you are volunteering, be happy that you been given the chance to take part in this year of service. Get to know your fellow volunteers; they are essentially your family for the year. Do things as a community, with intention. Lastly, get out of your comfort zone often and try new things. You never know what you might discover. If you have volunteered in the past, or have not yet found a way to do so, simply find ways to engage in the activities of service which draw you close to others. Expand or re-expand your life through committed acts of love to your neighbors.



REFLECTION

By **Monica Thom Konschnik**, Catholic Apostolate Center,
Catholic Volunteer Network Board of Directors



Christmas
Day

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good
news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, ‘Your God is King!’”*

- Isaiah 52:7-10

We hear such words of hope in the Gospel readings today! We are called to rejoice and celebrate the birth of our Savior, who has come to us in the form of a newborn baby. A new baby brings so much possibility to our lives. When holding a baby, one cannot help but imagine the potential this small child will have over the course of his or her life; the impact he or she will make in the world.

As a mother myself, I often think about what Mary must have felt when she saw her infant son for the first time: exhausted and sore from the trauma throughout her body after giving birth, the anxiety of how to care for this baby now and over the course of his life, and the fear of trying to keep him safe when she knew it would not be an easy road for him in life.

But all of that melted away in that first, beautiful gaze. The elation she must have felt upon meeting this little being that had grown inside of her; that had kicked and hiccupped and swam around inside her womb for nine long months. Despite her anxieties and fears, she knew she had made the right choice by saying “yes” to the angel when she saw that sweet little face for the first time.

In a world that is filled with darkness and negativity, we need to look into the face of the baby Jesus and remember our commitment to say “yes” even when it is difficult or frightening. We have chosen a life of faith and service and we are committed to spreading the good news of the Gospel through our words, but mostly, hopefully, through our actions of support, accompaniment, and presence to those who we serve, our communities, our families, and our world.

This Christmas season offers us the chance to be a light in a darkness and to be the face of Christ to someone in our lives – someone we may know or someone we have yet to meet. We can be that person who can bring glad tidings, announce joy, bear good news, and announce salvation because we have chosen, like Mary, to say “yes” to God’s call to make this world a place filled with hope, joy, and love.

Peace Be With You!



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



Catholic Volunteer Network

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

