

ADVENT

2019

- 🔥 Social Justice
- 🔥 Simple Living
- 🔥 Community
- 🔥 Spirituality

Volunteer Reflections on the Advent Gospels

WELCOME!



"O Come Let Us Adore Him. O Come Let Us Adore Him. O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord."

The words to the refrain of one of my favorite Christmas hymns, "O Come All Ye Faithful," invites us. We are invited to go out and to adore Christ. How fitting is this imagery to celebrate Advent during your time of service or after your time of service, no matter how many years you are removed from the experience.

Through service, we are invited into a relationship. With Christ. With ourselves. With those we serve. And with those with whom we are serving, our volunteer community. What a beautiful gift it is to have the opportunity, the privilege to be in relationship with those around us in such an intentional and intimate way. This intentionality does not always make it easy, though. We must, daily, make the choice to live in this way, to be open to the relationships with those around us.

This Advent, take the time to make that choice to intentionally spend time in relationship with Christ, with yourself, and with others. With Christ, take time to pray each day and listen to how he is speaking to you through your prayer. With yourself, tune into what makes you happy and what you need in order to provide self-care in the midst of our busy lives. With others, be patient with those around you – whether your community members, those who you are working with, or with strangers – allow yourself to be in relationship with them and see the great work God is doing inside them.

We hope this reflection guide will help aid you in this time of waiting and of anticipation. Four current and former volunteers from Catholic Volunteer Network programs have taken the Gospel readings for each Sunday and thoughtfully reflected on them in light of their service experience. They offer ideas for service and prayer to help your Advent journey of waiting and of anticipation this year.

Please know that the prayers of Catholic Volunteer Network and the Catholic Apostolate Center are with you during this Advent season as we wait patiently for the joyful coming of Christ, both at Christmas and at the end of time.

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

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Looking for more? 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 **Mike McCormick**, Former Augustinian Volunteer; Catholic Volunteer Network Staff

ADVENT 2019
Week One

"At an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come..." - Matthew 24:37-44

Today's Gospel reading launches us into Advent, with Jesus imploring his disciples to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man. The disciples are told to "Stay awake!" and are advised to prepare in the way Noah prepared for the flood, and in the way that a master of the house might prepare if he knew exactly when a thief would arrive. There is something disarming and perhaps even disconcerting about Jesus' message today. How many of us are truly "staying awake"? How many of us are prepared to leave our old lives and habits behind to follow the Lord when, say, the clock strikes twelve?

To me, this Gospel provides a perfect opportunity to reflect on our relationship with time. During my volunteer year with the Augustinians, I had no idea how quickly time would pass. It seemed like only a moment between my arrival in California in August and our midyear retreat in January. The second half of the year passed almost as quickly. All the while, the Community Assistance Program where I worked challenged me to be organized so that when urgent matters arose, I would be ready to "leave behind" all my nonessential work and respond. Situations such as clients' health emergencies, family illnesses and deaths, home evictions, and mental health crises were more important than my own workday, my community life, or my own "volunteer experience." It took quite a lot of experience for me to learn these priorities, though! While the final day of my service year still snuck up on me like a thief, I like to think I will now remain just a little more "awake" than if I had never volunteered.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Advent, I would like to challenge you to offer direct help to a senior citizen in your community. Oftentimes, seniors spend the Advent and Christmas seasons in isolation. Seniors may also face physical challenges which may prevent them from attending events or visiting neighbors and friends. Over the next few weeks, can you offer some of your time – perhaps by visiting with a senior in their home, or by offering to transport them to a place they'd like to be?

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

In today's First Reading from Isaiah, we are granted a vision of what the coming of the Son of Man might look like: people from all nations will stream together, ascending to the house of the Lord, receiving instruction, and disperse to spread the Word and the light of God throughout the world. We are also told how "one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

In contrast to the Gospel's call for personal readiness ("Stay awake!"), this reading from Isaiah proclaims that we as nations should prepare too. As we read daily about the conflict and oppression happening in communities around the world, I find great hope in Isaiah's words. God comforts his people. I pray that we the American people, and our leaders, might renew our multifaceted efforts towards peace for all communities, abroad and at home.

PRAYER

God, you have given us this Advent season and we are thankful. We offer ourselves and everything we do to you. In the days ahead, help us to show to each other kindness, patience, gentleness, and above all love – which keep us together.

This we ask through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



REFLECTION

By **Ben Cox**, Sojourners Internship Program

ADVENT 2019
Week Two

"I am not worthy to carry his sandals." - Matthew 3:1-12

Although I want to be like the wheat that will be gathered by Jesus, and not like the chaff burning in "unquenchable fire," I am, in fact, made of both wheat and chaff. Being the perfect follower of Christ is easier said than done; just as wheat develops chaff, so too do humans make mistakes.

I have at times felt so scared of messing up that I had no desire to do anything. I can relate to John the Baptist, who felt unworthy to carry Jesus' sandals. Yet, Jesus loved him just as he loves us. Furthermore, John the Baptist assures us that we are more than our past mistakes. Christ will burn our chaff, what separates us from God, so that it will be no more and will not define us.

It would be easy to misinterpret John the Baptist's words and think that some people who make mistakes will forever burn in this unquenchable fire, but that is not the Gospel. I like how 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 explicitly describes God's use of fire on the last day - it is cleansing, not condemning. According to 1 Corinthians, everything we do in our lives that is not built on Christ will be burned up, yet the builder (i.e. us) will be saved...but only as one escaping through flames. I will never be perfect here on Earth, and there is a chance I'll mess up at this nonprofit that I support as a Sojourners intern, but that imperfection does not define me and will not stop me from living boldly and doing my absolute best.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

The classic example of a "nice thing to do" in school was to sit with someone at lunch who was by themselves. I'm no longer in that school environment, but there are still people like that who I see every day on my way to work or regularly at the gym.

Would it hurt to introduce ourselves to that person and listen if they want to share? I have a fear of their reaction, but chances are that recognizing their presence will be appreciated as long as we are appropriate. I invite you to try this with me the remainder of Advent.

Focus: SIMPLE LIVING

As temperatures drop below freezing I find myself wanting to adjust the heating in the house; but John the Baptist didn't even have a house. Having enough money to buy a variety of groceries seems like a "need" to me rather than a "want", but John the Baptist ate locusts and honey. Although I still would like to have a roof over my head, thinking about John the Baptist certainly makes me question what "needs" I actually have, and encourages me to value a "theology of enough."

PRAYER

Loving God, sometimes I fail. I'm afraid of messing up. I may value my reputation more than I value doing the right thing.

Please help me hold you at the front of my mind as I try to do what you would have me do.

Thank you for cutting down and burning every aspect of myself that is not built with you as the foundation.

Please guide me so I may be satisfied with having enough and know how I can best serve you.

Amen.



REFLECTION

By **Miguel Petrosky**, Sojourners Internship Program

ADVENT 2019
Week Three

"Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you." - Matthew 11:2-11

In today's Gospel, we read of John the Baptist in prison. In fact, he is imprisoned by King Herod for speaking out against his kingdom and for calling out Herod's adultery with his sister-in-law. Like others who have been imprisoned for truth-telling, it would be easy for him to lose hope. John the Baptist then sends his own disciples to Jesus, the one in whom he placed his hope, double-checking to see whether his hope was possibly misguided. Jesus relays to John's disciples the message of all the wonderful things going on outside of John's visual periphery, since the prison walls kept John from seeing the Living Word that he had preached consistently when he was free, and by the Jordan river.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Carve out time in your schedule to grab coffee or dine with a friend this week. If your tendency is to talk more than listen, hold back and be attentive to what the Spirit might be saying to you through your conversation. If your tendency is to listen, continue listening but also be willing to say what's on your mind—you might be surprised that things you say can really uplift those in your life.

PRAYER

Holy God, when you breathed Adam from the dust of the earth, you said that, "It was not good for him to be alone," and you then created Eve. When Jesus walked on this earth, he had twelve disciples, and three that were particularly close to him. Even us, O God, we are not meant to be alone.

Remind us to hear the good news that's all around us—from our family, friends, and even strangers. Open our eyes and ears to the things we might be missing because of the busyness and humdrum of life's pressing rituals and incline our hearts to what you are doing in our midst. We ask for these things in our holy name. Amen.

Focus: COMMUNITY

During the Advent season, like the prophets and peoples before the birth of Christ, we wait and hope. Apathy and disillusionment are constant companions when people are working towards social justice, but the good news is we are not alone. We have intentional communities and companions who walk alongside us—sharing in the good news. We may find inspiration in unexpected places or find ourselves suddenly open to new insights and different ways of looking at the world. We may hear of immigrants who find homes, or of refugees who find solace. We may hear that lower-income individuals receive good word, such as that their health insurance covered a much-needed surgery.

We may even witness little resurrections, like when a damaged relationship, a forgone opportunity, a situation gone awry, or a heart-break are all flipped up-side down. Our friends, family, or even those off the beaten path, may have good messages and stories to tell. The question isn't the existence of good news; the question is whether we are actually listening to the good news happening in our own midst.



REFLECTION

By **Marina Jerry**, Franciscan Mission Service

ADVENT 2019
Week Four

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid..." Matthew 1:18-24

In today's Gospel reading, an angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream, encouraging him to accept the gift of baby Jesus into his family and to "not be afraid." We can only imagine how scared Mary and Joseph, asked to raise the Son of God, must have felt during this time of uncertainty and change. Despite this fear, Joseph follows God's call and takes Mary into his home, choosing to accept the Gift that God has placed before him.

Like Joseph, I feel that my own fear often prevents me from serving and receiving God in the way that He desires. My fear of change, fear of making a mistake, fear of disappointing others, and fear of the unknown can be so overwhelming sometimes that I forget to listen to God speaking to me, asking me to embrace his gifts and to love and serve without fear or hesitation. While only Mary and Joseph were called to raise baby Jesus, God invites each one of us to serve him according to our own talents and circumstances and to accept the gifts that He puts in our lives. Today's Gospel reading encourages us to act like Joseph, transcending fear in order to serve the Lord as He asks us to.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to let go of fear and to embrace your Gift fully. Let me be of service to You and to carry out your will. Help me to follow You every day without hesitation. Amen.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

This week, I invite you to take time to reflect on what fears you have that prevent you from completely accepting the Lord's gifts. How do these fears limit your ability to love others and yourself unconditionally? Challenge yourself to overcome these fears and to freely and fully respond to God's call to service.

Focus: SPIRITUALITY

While it may be difficult, it is essential to embrace uncertainty, discomfort, and fear and to trust in God's will. As an introvert-at-heart working with approximately four hundred high school students, my work often challenges me to be more loud, assertive, and outgoing than I would typically be comfortable with. While this was challenging and uncomfortable at first, I've grown so much from this experience.

Service is not always easy, but I think that if we are following God's genuine call to serve, service is always rewarding. The students and staff at Don Bosco Cristo Rey High have shown me compassion, joy, love, authenticity and vulnerability in a way that reflects God. Despite the initial discomfort we might feel in serving others, it is important to keep in mind the words of today's Gospel, "God is with us." We can grow spiritually by overcoming fear and discomfort in order to follow God's call to serve.



REFLECTION

ADVENT 2019
Christmas

By **Catholic Apostolate Center** and
Catholic Volunteer Network

*"AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE
HIS DWELLING AMONG US." JOHN 1:1-18*

Merry Christmas!

Today we rejoice in God's overwhelming love for us, expressed through his Son Jesus. In our Christmas Day Gospel, John writes, "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

The Advent Gospels (and our writers) have helped us prepare for this day! We have been encouraged through the words of the prophets, John the Baptist, and the angel Gabriel, who said – "Do not be afraid." God knows that we yearn to be free, and thus sends Christ into our midst. Through Christ we are once again invited into the "fulness of life" – where hope and joy are realities, not dreams.

Pope Francis tell us: "Christmas is joy."

What is the joy of Christmas? It is the joy of our encounter with Jesus Christ! There is plenty of manufactured joy that is fleeting, especially during the Christmas season. The joy that we experience in the love of Christ, though, is eternal. It is not simply happiness in a thing or a moment.

Our joy is the Good News of salvation in Christ, the Incarnate One, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Look at a scene of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. In that humble moment, God comes as an infant child for one reason and one reason only, for us to have the opportunity for salvation.

The rarely sung third verse of the Christmas carol, O Holy Night, reminds us of the joy and freedom that come from Jesus Christ:

Truly He taught us to love one another / His law is Love and His gospel is Peace / Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, / And in His name all oppression shall cease, / Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise we / Let all within us praise His Holy name! / Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we! / His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim! / His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!

Thank you for walking with us this Advent, and for sharing in our reflections, prayers, and service suggestions. We sincerely hope that faith-based service will continue to be a part of your life in the future. Merry Christmas, and a blessed New Year.

Sincerely,

Catholic Apostolate Center and **Catholic Volunteer Network**

Joy to the World!



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 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

