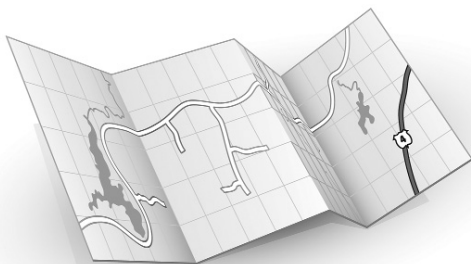


2008 Advent Meditation Guide for Students

REFLECTIONS *for the* JOURNEY



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These meditations were written by students, faculty, and staff from the University Lutheran Center at South Dakota State University. The authors represent a variety of faith traditions.

In recent years, Advent's penitential beginning as a 'little Lent' has diminished in the frenzy that begins when Halloween costumes are replaced by Christmas decorations on store shelves. It hits full stride on Black Friday, when merchants hope to make the year profitable, as the day following Thanksgiving brings out shoppers to put their finances "in the black" for the year.

In the midst of this onslaught, the themes of Advent keep us grounded and centered. Expectation...anticipation...preparation...and longing, guide us through the chaos of the marketplace and our conflicted feelings on campus, as next week's final tempers our longing for Christmas to come quickly

At its best, the church is a place where truth is spoken. These meditations are each author's effort to name or point to what is true: in the lesson of the day, the season, and in his or her faith journey. They seek to be real, authentic, and true.

We pray they will encourage, comfort, and guide you on your faith journey this Advent Season.

Traveling mercies to you.

*Pastor Bob Chell
Lutheran Campus Pastor
South Dakota State University*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master... so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him... You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Luke 12:35, 36, 40

I remember when I was younger and waiting for a friend to come over and play, or for my parents to take me somewhere exciting. These were times of extreme excitement and tension. I was always ready at least an hour early with nothing to do but sit and wait patiently. The patiently part wasn't always easy, but it is the eagerness and excitement that I can't forget. When we read this passage, we find Jesus is urging us to have that same sense of eagerness and patience for his coming. As Christians, we think this should be easy, but without knowing the day or the hour or even the century, we find it sometimes hard to maintain that alertness. We are urged on every day by Scripture and by other Christians to maintain our quest by keeping him close. We are called to have the faith of a child. We are also called to have the eagerness and excitement of a child; especially in our wait for his coming.

Elizabeth Batchelder
Pharmacy

Dear Lord, help us to remain ever alert and watchful for you. We pray for courage to use the strength you provide each day to be faithful servants. Thank you for all our blessings and most of all for your son Jesus Christ.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

*You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.
How is it that you don't know how to interpret the present time?*

Luke 12:56

Everyday we use our senses to interpret events in our daily lives. We interpret the moods of other people by their facial expressions, we interpret how food will taste by the way it looks, and we interpret how our day will go by how we feel when we wake up. In Luke 12:54-55, Jesus tells us how we interpret things everyday by saying: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "It's going to rain", and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, "It's going to be hot", and it is." And I am sure there are numerous other examples of how we use our interpreting skills in our daily lives.

However when it comes to the interpretation of Advent, or the Christmas season, as most of us refer to it, many times we miss the mark a little bit, even as Christians. The consumer world has taken over the season with the hustle and bustle of shopping, and decorating, and getting our picture taken with Santa Claus at the mall. All of this commotion has altered our interpretation of the season. During Advent, as we wait to celebrate Jesus' birth and prepare for the coming of Christ look past the consumer world to what God is getting ready to share with us: the birth of his son Jesus Christ. And as he prepares us for the season interpret his words and share all the joy, hope, peace, and love that comes with believing in the reason for the season.

*Amy Hansmeier
Nursing*

God, during this Advent season, help us to use our interpretive skills to see and hear what the season is all about. Help us to prepare ourselves for the marvelous gift that is to come.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

The Lord watches over strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Psalm 146:9

Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise for God's help. In the process, however, it also becomes a prescription for how we are to encounter the world. In praising God for executing justice for the oppressed and providing food for the hungry, the psalmist is, in effect, suggesting that this is how we, as followers of God, are to act.

The psalmist praises the Lord for setting the prisoners free. News stories recently reported that more than one in 100 American adults are in jail or prison. For young black males, the number is one in nine. Endless debates could occur over who or what is to blame for this condition. One thing we can all agree upon is that it is a terrible blot upon our society.

The psalmist says that the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The richest 400 people in the United States have more than \$1 trillion in net worth. The share of pretax income going to the wealthiest one percent of American households has jumped from nine to sixteen percent since 1979. This, while millions have trouble putting food on the table. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, and we should see what we can do to help him do it.

"The Lord watches over strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." This is the hope-and the warning-that Psalm 146 brings to us.

John Miller
Professor Emeritus of History

Lord, we praise you for your goodness and gifts to us. May we participate in your work to lift up those who are bowed down and to bring justice to all in need.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

Isaiah 65:24

This is a verse that has been there throughout my life and is still there whispering to me every day. It reminds me of how God is there with me all the time and even when I do not realize it, he knows what I need before I even know I need anything.

God is a constant. He is always with me even though it may not seem like it. He is always with me, waiting in the background, waiting to come to my rescue any, and every, time I need him. He lets me come to him and choose him. He makes me realize how important he is to me and how much I need him.

This verse makes me realize that God is my best friend. He is always going to be there for me no matter what. He will not flake out on me when the going gets tough and everyone else is gone.

I had a really rough time during my first year and a half in college. It never really got better until I accepted him and asked him to take my life and make it his. That night I accepted him was such an amazing experience like none other. All my stress and bad thoughts suddenly had evaporated and suddenly I felt carefree and the happiest and safest I had ever felt. I could even feel him wrap his arms around me and he gave me just what I needed, a friend and a Savior.

*Keely Lawton
Health Promotions*

Thank you for coming into my life just when I needed you. Please keep working in my heart and mold me into the Christian that I am meant to be. I love you.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

Luke 13:24,30

As a freshman in high school, I remember waiting in the lunch line eager to get to the limited supply of chocolate milk. As I inched closer, I was certain I would get a carton. However, just when I thought I was one hundred percent sure, a swarm of hungry upperclassmen would cut in line and grab the last couple of cartons. My hopes were crushed. The seniority rule had struck again.

My high school has a rule about seniority in the lunchroom. Once a student becomes a junior or senior, he or she has the privilege to budge in the lunch line. As a freshman, I thought this rule was unfair because I believed if a person was doing everything right, then they should be granted their goal. But as I grew older I realized there was more to the seniority rule. It taught a valuable lesson: that rewards are never given without another person's sacrifice.

Everything in life has a give and take. For three years, I watched the chocolate milk disappear, but I remained optimistic because someday I would be able to relish the sweet treat. Eventually, everyone was given a chance at the limited supply. God gave up his Son because he did not want a limited supply. The sacrifice was valuable because it granted us the greatest gifts: life, forgiveness, chocolate milk, and joining him, heaven.

Emily Kuecker

Communication Studies & Theatre: Specialization in Speech Communication

It is hard to find the optimistic part of some situations; therefore, open our eyes to the sacrifices of everyday. With this awareness, we will hopefully appreciate the little miracles in life even more.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly.

Psalm 147: 1

As I read this verse I began to think about how insufficient I am when it comes to praising God. It is difficult for me to remember to praise God for all the good things in my life, when I am focused on the negative, when things are not going how I would like them to. However, even when all seems well, I still seem to forget to praise God. It is easy to get caught up in the busyness of life and forget my purpose. I am on this earth to serve and praise God.

So easily, God's gifts are taken for granted: the loving family that surrounds me, adequate food and shelter, and all the opportunities that God has given me. Sometimes I have to step back and remember where all these great things came from. Thank you God! You are awesome! My goal is to see the glory of God in everything around me. Everything I do I want to do in honor of God. He is gracious, as the verse says. He gives so many gifts, as simple as they may be, we should remember to thank him and praise him. If a person did something nice for me, I would be sure to show my gratitude and probably write a thank you card. How can I forget to thank the giver of the ultimate sacrifice?

Kaylee Mundwiler
Spanish/Global Studies

Heavenly Father, thank you for all of the gifts you have given me, both big and small. Please help me always remember that my life is to serve and praise you.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

So Philip ran up to [the chariot] and heard [the Ethiopian eunuch] reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

Acts 8:30-31a

Over the course of the last year, I have taken an interest in three men who were intimately involved in the Christmas story: the wise men. After hearing the prophecy, these highly educated men could think of nothing more than to find the child lying in a manger. Their actions leave me in awe. The wisest men of their time believed the son of God was to be born to a virgin, of all people! They simply believed.

Recently, I saw the movie *The Bucket List* with Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson. In the movie, one character is a faithful Christ follower, and the other has no faith in anything. Morgan Freeman is trying to explain the concept of faith to Jack Nicholson's character and says, "Maybe you cannot get your head around the concept of faith because your head is getting in the way." I love this quote. I think it is the perfect description of why many people struggle to believe. As Christians, we are not claiming to know something that other people may not, we simply have faith!

As college students, it is challenging to possess a rock-solid faith. Being away from our church homes and faith families, we are vulnerable to doubt and feelings of confusion. In college, we are surrounded by peers who may believe and worship differently. At times classes or professors test our faith. But the overall beauty of your faith is that it is yours! Surround yourself with others who feel and believe the same way you do. Let them help nurture your faith and help it grow!

Tamara Berg
Pharmacy

Allow me to continue to grow in my faith. No matter what I may come across in my life let me know that my faith in you will carry me through it.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

For he loves us with unfailing love: the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Psalm 117:2

This time of year, it is easy to dream of summer. It is wonderful to dream about the warm days to come and the sun and green grass during the solemn and bitter winter. It is so easy to wake up happy when the sun is shining and the temperatures are warm. The days seem blissfully long and there are so many things that can be done. Everything feels fresh, beautiful, and new. While warmed on the outside by the sun, the soul is warmed by family vacations and outdoor joys. Many times in our lives we can relate our feelings to the seasons. Some moments are cold and dark, like the hardest days of winter. Other days are full of the endless joy and warmth of summer.

But, just as the weather is ever changing, we cannot count on what will come tomorrow. The perfectly planned picnic may be ruined by rain or a blizzard may postpone an important trip. Storms come into our lives as fast as the seasons seem to change. It is sometimes hard to see the sun and the beauty of the day, or to enjoy the holiday spirit. It is easy to become bitter seeing others who aren't hurting as much, aren't as busy, or are "more blessed" than yourself.

In these times we must remember the one thing we can count on. Jesus Christ. Just as the Psalm says "He loves us with unfailing love, the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever."

*Melissa Rahe
Music Education*

Lord, help me to hold on to the one constant life has: you and your faithfulness and love. Help me to see the beauty in each day.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Praise the Lord! What a simple and fitting conclusion to the Book of Psalms. What a fitting beginning to the season of Advent and the good news that awaits us at Christmas.

Every time I hear or read that phrase, I am reminded of how many times as a child I heard people sigh a huge relief after a near disaster was averted or some trivial, yet problematic, situation was resolved. “Praise the Lord! We made it here in spite of the weather,” a relative might say, for example.

I wonder how often we think to shout “Praise the Lord” not only when good things happen to us or bad things are avoided, but simply because God is to be praised at all times and in all places. How often do we pray in gratitude for the lives we have? How often do we give thanks for the gifts we have been given? In what ways have we praised God for the gift of himself poured out and made known to us in Christ Jesus? In this Advent season, let us remind ourselves of God’s abundant blessings, of his generosity, and love that knows no bounds. Let us praise the Lord for this time of waiting and watching. Praise him with trumpet sound and with loud clashing cymbals.

Andrew J. Stremmel, Ph.D.

Professor & Department Head

Human Development, Consumer & Family Sciences

Gracious God, we give praise to you in this moment with waiting heart and eager anticipation. May we praise you in every season knowing that Christ is coming soon.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night.

Psalm 92:1-2

I live with several other girls, and we get along great until the Christmas season approaches. I love to listen to Christmas music as early as October, but a few of the girls will not listen until December 1st. I usually sneak in a few songs while I'm in my room, though once that first day of December comes, we all start singing! We sing at breakfast, while walking to class, and even on our daily runs.

The more we sing, the more we anticipate the holiday. The season of Advent allows us to prepare ourselves for time spent with family and friends, while praising God and his gift to us. As we decorate, wrap gifts, and make cookies, the music helps remind us of Christ's birth. Like in the song, "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel", Jesus is coming, so let's "Rejoice!"

I'm lucky to live with girls who share the same faith, and I love being able to sing praises to our King with them. As we wait for the celebration of the birth of Christ, let's sing our praises of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father.

The Lord loves to hear our voices turn toward him. Just keep in mind what Psalm 92 says and remember that praising, singing, and thanking him does not have to wait until December 1st!

Heidi Quail
Math Education

Lord, thank you for this season! Please help us to sing and give thanks throughout the entire year.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

*God, listen! Listen to my prayer, listen to the pain in my cries.
Don't turn your back on me just when I need you so desperately.
Pay attention! This is a cry for help! And hurry - this can't wait!*

Psalm 102:1-2 from *The Message/Remix*
-Eugene Peterson translation

When I was newly married, living a thousand miles from home, I found a fast-paced, exciting life cut short by a car accident that severely injured me. Broken bones, facial lacerations and a head fracture put me in a coma for over a month. Intense physical therapy followed to get ready to move again halfway across the country.

We made the move at Christmas through South Dakota stopping to see family and friends who told me they'd prayed for my recovery. I was grateful for their concern, but filled with wonder over why I was spared.

I wasn't anyone special and felt a bit resentful of people who thought they could claim my recovery because of their prayers. Like the psalmist, I prayed, "Listen, God. This is a cry for help!"

Advent gives that same sense of desperate expectation. We're looking for reminders that despite the calamities in our lives, God has something planned for us even if we don't know it, can't see it, or don't deserve it. Advent is about hope and longing and the impulse to pray is deep within us.

Praying the psalms gives us assurance that God loves us in spite of, and maybe because of, who we are. Jesus also prayed the psalms.

Jeannie Jones-Manzer
SDSU News Editor

Dear God, in anticipation of your plan for my life, help me not be impatient or discouraged, but know that you have a life-crown sized and ready for me. Let me prepare, through this Advent, for the celebration of the Savior's coming.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

*If the Lord had not been on our side—
the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept
over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.*

Psalm 124:1a,4-5

So many times each semester, the burdens of life accumulate and can seem to make us feel like we are drowning.

However, even with our piles of homework, our relationship problems, and our financial concerns, we are not prevented from living our lives. The resources that God provides through friends, family, and faith allow us to get through the tough times in our earthly lives. A friend's hug, a reflective prayer, or a call to Mom, provide some of that support.

Along the way, nearly every struggle provides a lesson for future issues, which may include starting the next set of homework earlier, driving a little less to save money, or keeping in better touch with old friends who care.

And through all this, we are hopefully reminded that life is not about just me or just you. Living life includes others and includes God. We are always saved from our burdens from birth till death by God's goodness brought to us in his son, Jesus Christ.

And for that we can be genuinely thankful.

*Andrew Natzel
Civil Engineering*

Heavenly Father, as we prepare for the celebration of your son's birth, we are reminded to be thankful of how he has lifted the burdens from our lives. Please guide us in our lives, through the good and bad, and always toward the path of Jesus Christ.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

Revelations 3:2

Each year as Christmas rolls around I find myself in a constant struggle between getting caught up in today's materialism and the values and ideals Christmas is really about. I think this is a common battle for young adults. I know I'm guilty of getting absorbed in the shopping and the craze of the holiday season each and every year, at least once.

The feeling of being caught in a tug of war between the popular culture's production of Christmas and our own beliefs has become an all too common one, but in all honesty why wouldn't we be confused? Television and other forms of media present the holiday season as this materialistic time of the year, all about finding the number one gift at the best price possible. At the same time is it really so wrong to want to find that perfect gift for the people that mean so much to us? I believe this is where the confusion lies for many of us. Are the true ideals of Christmas really disappearing, or have we just taken it upon ourselves as a culture to transform Christmas with our changing society? I believe it's a combination of the two. While our society might be transforming, it's important for us to wake up and check in with ourselves, our beliefs, our values, and what Christmas really means to us as individuals.

Danika Busse

Human Development and Family Studies / Sociology

God of transformation, help us to maintain strength in our beliefs with eyes open to new and just ideas.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

Malachi 4:1-2

The people of Israel thought when the Messiah came, he would overthrow their oppressors, the Romans. What actually took place confounded them: he gave away his life instead.

As we wait and prepare for Christmas, we can take stock of our own expectations of God. Are we expecting God to lay out a simple path for us (including that one perfect job and one perfect partner)? Perhaps we find that our life is a bit messier than we thought it would be.

And how do we picture God? How would we describe him? Sometimes we try to put God in a box, to apply simple descriptors. But history shows us that God does not always conform to our limited understandings of him.

*Bill Alsaker,
Mathematics*

Dear God, as we wait for you to come to us, help us to open our hearts to you, a God that we cannot simplify. And help us trust in you, as you lead us down a path that we may not fully comprehend.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Psalm 117: 1-2

This is a message that bears repeating. Praise God and be thankful for the precious gift of his son. This is easy to say but proves difficult in practice. In the hurry to buy the last few gifts, bake the last batch of cookies, and hang the decorations, it is easy to forget to praise God. Before we get too stressed about what the Visa bill is going to be, or what we are going to wear to that Christmas party, we need to take a minute to reflect. When we do, we see that the gift of a child, God's only son, is an awesome and wondrous gift. Take a minute today to praise God and thank him for all your many blessings.

*Krissa LeLaCheur
Political Science*

Dear Lord, thank you for today, thank you for all the many blessings in my life, and thank you for the ultimate gift of your son. I often get distracted by the material aspects of Christmas and forget to focus on you. Forgive me and help me to remember to be thankful and praise you.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

I am coming soon. Continue strong in your faith so no one will take away your crown.

Revelation 3:11

So often we allow ourselves to say we will start tomorrow. Whether we are going to start a new diet, or begin an exercise program, we always say we will start tomorrow. Then, tomorrow becomes today and once again we say we'll start tomorrow. I find myself saying tomorrow I will eat better, or tomorrow I will run farther, but tomorrow never comes.

Just as we put things off to improve our physical health, we also put off practices that would improve our spiritual health. We can always work towards improving our relationship with our Savior, but we struggle with our inner selves to make the proper commitments. We might say tomorrow we'll start reading the Bible, or tomorrow we'll join the church choir, but until we do, these are just good intentions. Jesus gave us the gift of eternal life, not through the intention of dying on the cross for us, but by actually sacrificing his life at Calvary. Since we are Christians, we have the duty to be ready for Jesus and lead others to him. We want to experience our walk with Christ to the fullest and have no regrets when he comes again. We want to be able to say that we lived our lives for Christ, that we actually lived as God wanted us to, not just that we intended to.

If we start today to walk in our faith the way we intend, to treat others with compassion, to dig into the Bible, to share our faith with those around us, we will keep the crown Jesus has prepared for us. Today is the day, tomorrow may never come, so take advantage of what God has given us and start living today.

*Courtney Grimsrud
Biology/Pre-Medicine*

Ever-living God, please help us to not hold ourselves back and allow us to live for you today and each day that we inhabit this earth. Help us to prepare for you to come again.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.

Psalm 146:2

This is a very busy time of year, with final tests and final projects at the end of the semester, searching for the perfect gifts for family and friends, and traveling to be with family to celebrate this great season. There are many things that can make us busy and distract us from what is truly important.

With all that is going on, we can lose focus on God and praising him for all he has done. We are distracted with all the traveling to various locations and the Christmas dinners, as well as purchasing gifts and all the Christmas decorations.

We need to slow down; stop what we are doing. Take a break from wrapping gifts, decorating the Christmas tree, or preparing the dinner. We all need to take time to praise God; not only during Advent, but throughout the year, and throughout our lives. Together, as family and friends, we should sing praises to our God!

Cory Koster

Religion and Philosophy

Loving God, help us to slow down and give you the praise which you deserve.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Revelation 4:11

Do you, Lord and God, receive glory, and honor, and power from me? Speaking from a personal perspective, giving you honor and glory are easy compared to giving you power. I know you have power, but since I can give you honor and glory, can I give you power? I begin evening prayer with acknowledgement of your awesome character and omnipotence. I honor you with my attention through worship and Bible study. I attempt to honor you with my generosity. I appreciate your beautiful presence in my life and the community in which I live. I accept your grace and know the gift of your son, to save me, is beyond my ability to understand. Giving you glory and honor is easy during Advent, as so many preparations for Christmas are underway.

But is there any way I can give you power? Yes, it seems so; I can give you power over my actions; power to guide me, and power to help me make critical decisions. I can give you power to use me as one of your Christian lives on earth. You are certainly worthy of that power yet that is the hard part-to let go of my self-assurance and confidence. With me, what would you do? Since I am only one! In so many ways I can give you power. I know you created all things and I was created to have my own being, a being that can choose to give you power to use me for your will.

Katie Penrod

Professor, Teacher Education

College of Education and Counseling

Dear Heavenly Father let me choose to be a living instrument of your peace. Let me use my energy to praise you and thus reveal your goodness. Bring me closer to you during this precious time of year. As I give you the power of my voice and mind, may it be filled with your awesome love.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62: 8.

In any relationship trust is a very powerful word. To trust is to be one hundred percent reliant on another. In this age of independence, it can be very hard for anyone to accept that they need help. God asks us to do just that. He wants us to trust in him at all times; trust in his timing, rely on his promises, and to believe in his own existence. All of these statements demand trust. God does not say that being a Christian will be easy. But he promises that if we trust in him at all times and do his will, our lives will be filled with peace, joy, and hope.

In this time of Advent, we are reminded how Joseph trusted in God. Joseph planned to dismiss Mary quietly after she was found to be with a child, this child being Jesus, as we all know. But an angel of God appeared to him and said: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife". Had Joseph not trusted in God and His promises, he would have missed the single-most important event in human history, the birth of Jesus Christ.

So in your own life, when things don't go as you had planned, trust in God. He may have something amazing in store for your life that you never even imagined.

*Paul Aanonson
Health Promotion*

Loving God, help us to trust in you at all times and be our guiding light as we serve you.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Psalm 42:1, 2

When I was younger, I tried constantly to understand what was missing in my life. That feeling, that emptiness, was where God was supposed to be. Some people, like my past self, try to look for things to fill that void inside of us, that yearning for something more.

I was thirsting for God without even realizing it. After a few friends and years later, I am coming to understand that God not only has a part in my life, but he is a part of me. He is that missing part in all of us. Sometimes the noise of the world can distract us, whether it is an upcoming test or a relationship. Know that he is always there for you even when life is spiraling out of control. We all have a thirst for God. During this crazy Advent season, take some time and connect with God.

Patricia Murrill
Global Studies

Lord, during this Advent season, help us to break free of distractions of the world to set time aside for prayer and reflection so that we may keep our minds open, thinking of you.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.

Psalm 147:7

Singing is part of our Christian faith experience. In today's readings, the psalmist invites us to sing with an attitude of thanksgiving. Isaiah reminds us that in times of challenge and doubt we should burst into song. Luke tells us of Mary's song of praise and humility following Elizabeth's acknowledgement that Mary was carrying the child of God in her womb. Songs that are especially worshipful vary by person and generation, yet they serve a common need for unity with God.

The Christian community of Taizé in France has provided people all over the world with short lyrics sung over and over, giving them a meditative character. One of these songs repeats, "My soul sings praises to the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Repetition of these simple words penetrates my entire being and helps me to listen to God. Actually singing or simply listening to or reflecting on these lyrics in the quiet of my heart allows me to experience oneness with God.

Are there worship songs that provide this same experience for you? Are there lyrics that allow you to meditate on God regardless of where you are and what is going on around you? Sing these songs with thanksgiving and meditate on them at various times throughout the day. Praise the Lord through song!

Nancy L. Fahrenwald, Ph.D., R.N.
Associate Professor, College of Nursing

Loving God, you have blessed us with the gift of song. Help us to worship you through lyrics and melodies that provide a sense of union with you. Quiet our hearts and minds so that the songs of praise and worship that we offer to you help us to transcend the distractions in our lives. Thank you for the singers and the songwriters who use their gifts to help us strengthen our daily walk with you.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you call nations that you know not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Isaiah 55: 4-5

Me. Mine. Us. Them. They are words we use every day. Even more, they are the building blocks of our lives. To say “me” is to separate. I am not you; you are not me. We are separate, different. To say “mine” goes a step further, separating bits of the world as belonging to me, not you. The bits may be big: plots of land, automobiles, houses. They may be small: diamond rings, iPods, a pocket photograph. Things that are mine are somehow attached to me, as if by some mysterious bond. But they don’t belong to you.

When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, he proclaimed an end to me, mine, us, and them. Jesus came not for one person, not for one people, but for all. There is no longer “us and them,” but a “we” that includes all. There is no privileged nation, no people held higher than others. We are called by God to receive grace, peace, and love.

Christ calls the nations, and the nations run to him, though they know it not. Christ calls out to the nations, not out of judgment, but out of the freedom of grace. In the gospel, there is no “me and mine,” there is no “us and them.” There is only “we together.” That is the call of love.

Greg Peterson

Associate Professor of Religion & Philosophy

Gracious Lord, help us to examine our souls, to root out the “me and mine,” the “us and them.” Carry us in your grace, receiving your bounty of love, so that we too may share it with others, not out of guilt, but out of the joy of those who were once lost but now have been found.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing?

Galatians 3:3-4

Advent is characterized by not only readying for Christmas, but it's also a time of tying up loose ends. Taking a break can be a stressful endeavor in the midst of the crazy busyness that has become normal, maybe even laudable. Projects at work and papers and exams at school need to be finished before we can concern ourselves with all the churchy stuff. There simply isn't enough time. Christmas break often begins with anxiousness and pressure instead of peace and thanksgiving.

Concepts of responsibility, goals, and achievement, coupled with a desire to build our own personal kingdoms are preached to students their whole lives, and they require that the season of Advent wait until we're ready to celebrate. Recognition from peers and superiors is more immediately necessary and satisfying.

God calls us to build his kingdom. The concepts of self-serving, planning, and securing a future for one's self are nowhere to be found in the Bible. It is not those who build themselves up and achieve goals, but rather those who humble themselves and serve at the back of the line who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Tara Buehner

Grad student of Journalism and Communication Studies

God, during these last days of Lent, help us to slow down and attain our goals by the spirit. Help us to release our most coveted asset—that of your time. We trust that you will give us back much more than we could have ever obtained by our own human efforts.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103:12

God gives second chances. Actually, God gives us millions of chances, because, despite our endless mistakes God still loves us. I don't know about you, but I screw up a lot. Whether it is by judging others, denying God's will in my life, or giving into temptation, I cannot seem to stop failing God. After letting God down so many times, it is hard to see that God still has a plan to use me, but he does.

Simon-Peter was one of Jesus' most steadfast disciples. He promises never to leave Jesus but fails miserably and denies Jesus three times. Once the rooster crows, Peter realizes his broken promise to Jesus and buries his face in his hands and weeps.

The risen Lord appears to Peter and asks him three times if Peter loves Him. Peter answers with passion, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus then builds Peter's confidence and prepares him to serve. Simon-Peter denied God, but God did not give up on Peter, nor does God give up on you.

So when you feel as though you have screwed up so many times that God cannot use you, think again. Confess your sin, accept his forgiveness, and listen for God's voice to guide you to do his will. God has great plans for your life, so don't give up on yourself or on God.

Christa Larson
Food Science

Father forgive me for my sins. Help me to give them completely to you so that you may use me to do your will.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:20

The beginning of the Christmas Story. As I read it, I can't help but think what a miraculous experience this was for Joseph-getting direct guidance from God. How cool is that? Why can't God send an angel to directly guide my life?

The Christmas message is one of joy. However, sometimes all the "joy" serves as a mask for the true place that we are at in life. Those who have lost or are separated from a loved one, those drowning in credit card debt, or those suffering from any issue unwelcome at the Christmas Dinner table, may have a hard time finding the joy of Christmas.

Was Joseph's message one of "Joy" at the time? "Marry her anyway, regardless of what people think." God may not guide us through dreams, but no matter what the situation - oh, and did I mention the birth in the barn, away from family? God will never abandon us.

This Christmas Eve, focus on the truth, not the situation: God cares for you so much, that he sent Jesus into this world. God guided Joseph through crisis, he will guide you as well.

Nita Peterson
Nursing

Heavenly Father, thank you for your never-ending love. Let us hold on to the truth of the season. Knowing that no matter where we are, you meet us and unfold the moments of our lives so that your love for us prevails.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

*...but [Jesus] made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death-
even death on a cross!*

Philippians 2:7-8

Rejoice today, for Christ is born to save us from sin, death, and the devil! Today, millions of Christians worldwide are hearing and reflecting on this message of salvation. The sheer joy and happiness of this good news also reflects the atmosphere of peoples' homes. Families are gathering, eating, laughing, and sharing gifts. Houses are decorated and full of joyous music. All of this is centered on this special time and message.

Our reading from the daily lectionary for today takes a slightly different tone and message. Christ was born to die. He was born into our sinful world to experience suffering, humiliation, and death. This helpless infant, who is depicted as a beautiful child lying in the manger at the nativity, will be nailed to the tree.

Our text tells us that he took the nature of a servant. The prophet Isaiah foretold us about the suffering servant-our servant being obedient even to death on a cross! This is done because God loves us. He sent his son, born on this day, to die and to rise again, opening for us the gates of Heaven.

Rejoice today, for Christ is born to save us from sin, death, and the devil!

*Tyler Poppen
Senior Environmental Management Major*

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for entering our sinful world, being born to die. Thank you for entering again on your resurrection. Instill in us the desire for you to come again. Amen.