

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

December 7, 2014  
Advent 2B

## The readings this week:

- Isaiah 40:1-11 ◦ Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
- 2 Peter 3:8-15a ◦ Mark 1:1-8

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Leftovers

Every year in the days following Thanksgiving, our refrigerator is filled with food. I love reliving the deliciousness and the memories associated with a special day. Since we have a potluck Thanksgiving meal at our house, I also get to continue sampling the best of the cooking of others, because when everyone is headed home we trade turkey for pie, dressing for sweet potatoes, etc.

Truth be told, I think I even enjoy the leftovers more than the original servings, because the flavors seem to develop more in a day or two.

Then there are the "Leftovers, Next Generation." The ham bone gets turned into broth and combined with ham pieces, potatoes, leeks and herbs to create soup. The more-than-we-can-possibly-eat-before-it-goes-bad turkey becomes a casserole for the freezer. The turkey carcasses are boiled to make stock, which is also frozen to anticipate new uses in the future.

What about next generation faith?

I freely admit that John the Baptist is not my favorite biblical character. I don't suppose there's anything wrong with him, but it's hard for me to relate to his ascetic lifestyle of scratchy hair clothing and a diet of bugs. Many who lived in John's time and place, though, apparently found him a refreshing and intriguing change from those who cared more about appearance and luxury than they did the plight of ordinary people. Folks flocked to him and he baptized them into the faith of their ancestors. But as much as they loved John and imagined him to be the greatest of teachers, he spoke of one who would come after who



would be a truer expression of God among us. Of course he was speaking of Jesus, which is why this

text is read during Advent, to point our minds and hearts toward the coming of Christ, just as John pointed his contemporaries.

Here's where I'm thinking leftovers—in a good way.

Modern people often think their faith might've been stronger if they'd actually lived a couple thousand years ago in Palestine, had heard John or Jesus or Paul, had met Peter or one of the Marys. But John freely points to the near and far future when he preaches. The near future is that Jesus will appear on the scene. The baptizer believes that this cousin of his will have a much more important effect than John ever could. The far future is that it won't be a one-time pouring of water over people's heads, but a for-all-time pouring out of the spirit of God that Jesus will demonstrate. Far beyond even John's understanding, the advent of Jesus brings the presence of God to bear on every age.

So, as beautiful as the stories of Advent and Christmas are, as much as we might wish we could've been eye witnesses, the lasting effects of the coming of Jesus may even be better than what those first century believers experienced. People in every age have longed for—and even witnessed—the coming of God.

When someone you know has a health crisis, a loss, a tragedy, and is surrounded by the caring of those who love them, God has come to their home. When an estranged family member has the courage to pick up the phone and reconnect after years of absence, God's spirit is present. Every time a low spot of anxiety, depression or loneliness is filled with peace, God has drawn near. When you are overcome with the joy of watching a child laugh, or seeing an old friend, or hearing a favorite carol, Advent has arrived once more. If you are touched by someone's need, God is paying you a visit.

This re-emergence and re-imagining of faith, this coming anew of God which has occurred with every generation since the beginning, is a bit like leftovers. The season of Advent reminds us to revisit the exquisite moments of our faith tradition, while understanding that something new is always on the verge of being created. God is taking those beautiful flavors of the ancient past and delivering them to us in ever-new ways.



# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Isaiah 40:1-11](#)

If you were living in first century Palestine what kind of Messiah would you be waiting for? As you think about the life of Jesus, is he what you would expect in a Messiah? Why or why not? The wilderness is highlighted as a significant theme throughout our text for today. Consider all the various significances of the wilderness in the Bible. Why do you think in Isaiah God chooses the wilderness as the starting point for salvation? Deserts, valleys and mountains are hindrances to transport and communication. If all humanity is to see the glory of the Lord, these obstacles must be removed. What obstacles do you and your group or church face in both your local witness and global missions efforts? How can these obstacles be removed? How do these verses bring you the encouragement you need? [Bo Lim, SPU](#) and [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13](#)

Summarize what God has done in verses 1-3. How was His favor expressed to His people? What will God speak to His people? What warning is given to God's people in verse 8? Reflect on verse 11. What do you think it means? What does the psalmist declare God will do in verse 12? What sets us in the way we should walk? What do you learn from this psalm that will help you become a person after God's own heart? [HarvestTime.org](#)

### [This Fleeting Season....](#)

Advent is the time to prepare...each day, ponder a new question...and use the Advent Season to count your blessings one by one, many by many.

Sunday, November 30 *Where are you in the Christmas story?*

Monday, December 1 *What happened in January 2014? This can be a blessing or obstacle: some significant event, place, person, action that you want to remember...*

Tuesday, December 2 *What happened in February 2014?*

Wednesday, December 3 *What happened in March 2014?*

Thursday, December 4 *What happened in April 2014?*

Friday, December 5 *What happened in May 2014?*

Saturday, December 6 *What happened in June 2014?*

Almighty God,  
I hear it over and over: you are coming to me.

I feel my heart stir in anticipation,  
and I sense that you are inviting me  
to enter more deeply  
into the mystery of your birth.

Help me to feel renewed patience settle in my heart,  
and to lift my face in joy.

I have been like a lost lamb,  
but I hear your voice calling me  
and I feel how deeply you want me to return.  
Somehow I know that you rejoice in my desire to find you.

Help me not to be afraid to say out loud, to believe:  
Here is God, coming into my life.

[Praying Advent](#)

## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [2 Peter 3:8-15a](#)

When are you likely to wish the world would end? Explain. What reasons did Peter give his readers to pay attention to this writing? (Look especially at verses 1-3 and 15-18.) What reasons does Peter offer for a delay in Christ's return? Compare and contrast the use of fire and water in this passage. What is the significance of each? Notice the question of verse 11, "What kind of people ought you to be?" What answers can you find through the remainder of the chapter? If the day of the Lord were to come in your lifetime, what would you like to accomplish first? In what condition would you like God to find your work? How would you like God to find your relationships? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [Mark 1:1-8](#)

What does it mean to you that Jesus is King? What images and feelings does that bring to mind? Verses 2 and 3 combine quotations from Malachi and Isaiah. What do these two quotations have in common? How does John's ministry prepare the way for Jesus? How does John emphasize the greatness of the one who will come after him? Despite his greatness, Jesus came to John for baptism. What does this tell us about Jesus' relationship to us? How do the events surrounding Jesus' baptism prepare him for his temptation in the desert? How does Jesus summarize his mission at the beginning of his ministry? What temptations are you currently struggling with? What encouragement do you find here for facing your own temptations? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)