

# Stretching Toward Sunday

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

December 6, 2015  
Second Sunday of Advent

**The readings this week:**  
◦ *Malachi 3:1-4* ◦ *Luke 1:68-79*  
◦ *Philippians 1:3-11* ◦ *Luke 3:1-6*



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

## Sin at Yuletide

Most people don't ever want to talk about "sins." At least not their own. (Other people's sins are always fair game for in-depth discussion, but that's another story entirely.)

The only things that might be able to drive the repulsion of "sin talk" even further out-of-bounds are probably...Christmas trees, mall Santas, and fields of ever-rolling poinsettias.

Congregations probably expect to hear about sin at some point in the year. In fact, many might get uneasy if they never heard the word. But in December? "Come on, Reverend, cool the jets a bit, and let's sing some carols."

But, John the Baptist, the voice crying out of the wilderness, forbids us from abandoning our handle on sin. He came to prepare the way for Jesus, and he came talking about sin and repentance.

In fact, he didn't just talk about it, he:

*went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

It's so easy to forget among all the holly sprigs and gallons of eggnog, that the whole business of Jesus coming to earth is all about bringing us into right relationship with the God who loves us so much. It's all about forgiveness.

And we're not talking about forgiving bad gift choices. Or, wearing elf slippers to the Dunkin' Donuts. (Not that I've ever done that...)

In Christ, we're forgiven of our sins. The things we do which betray the holiness and the love of God. The things we do which hurt our neighbors – those we know, and the innocent bystanders. The ways we hurt ourselves over and over again.

From the Song of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist:

*You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, To give people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us.*

That's why the angels sang, and the shepherds left their flocks, and the wise men made their journey.

It's why a man donned a camel hair robe, grabbed his lunch pail full of locusts, and headed off to Jordan's river banks.

And, it's why we dress our children up as donkeys and angels, sing "Angels We Have Heard on High," and stand up straight with a tear in our eye for the Hallelujah Chorus.

Because in the birth of Jesus we are given the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness for everything. Anything.

All of it.

Hallelujah.

~ Rick Morley, [a garden path](#)

C. S. Lewis writes:

*The Queen let another drop fall from her bottle on to the snow, and instantly there appeared a round box, tied with green silk ribbon, which, when opened, turned out to contain several pounds of the best Turkish Delight. Each piece was sweet and light to the very centre and Edmund had never tasted anything more delicious. ... At first Edmund tried to remember that it is rude to speak with one's mouth full, but soon he forgot about this and thought only of trying to shovel down as much Turkish Delight as he could, and the more he ate the more he wanted to eat ...*



# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

Malachi addresses people in a mixed society of exiles returning and foreigners intermarrying and people who never left. How can good news come out of this chaos? And yet we come full circle, returning to Malachi's good news. God loves us. God will forgive us. Our offerings will once again be pleasing to Him. It will be good, because God is in control. How does the good news of God's promises fulfilled, regardless of our human fears and foibles, impact you on a daily basis? How can this news impact you in this season of waiting? [United Methodist Church of Yucaipa](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: Luke 1:68-79

How do you feel when you are part of a hopeful minority among pessimistic people on a committee or in a group? In Zechariah's inspired prophecy he sees the great acts that God's Redeemer will do, and his child's unique relation to this Redeemer. Suppose you were one of Zechariah's neighbors or relatives listening to him. Which part would have stirred you as a devout Jew? When is it difficult for you to hope in God? Zechariah and Mary expressed their hope in God differently. What in their interaction with God gives you hope as you also seek to trust God totally? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



## Praying Toward Sunday

*Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming,  
We wait filled with hope,  
Knowing your light will shine in the darkness.  
We wait anticipating your peace,  
Believing that one day it will fill our world.  
We wait embracing your love,  
May we reach out to share it with our neighbors.  
We wait with joy,  
Bubbling us in expectation of your birth.  
Lord we wait,  
Come soon and fill us with your life.*

~ Christine Sine (2012), [GodSpace](#)

## Anticipate...The King

- ◇ What are some things you enjoy in your life that you believe should be normal for everyone?
- ◇ How does sin affect your relationship with God, self, others, and the world?
- ◇ What does God's promised perfect day look like to you?
- ◇ How would you act if that perfect day was today?
- ◇ List the things that would have to change in your life if God's perfect day was today.

[Wenatchee Church](#)

## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: Philippians 1:3-11

Why did the Philippians bring Paul joy? Who is someone of whom you can say, "I thank my God every time I think of you" and why? When you pray, what percentage of your prayer is focused on talking to God, and what percentage is focused on listening for God's voice and discerning God's will? What specific requests did Paul bring before God when he prayed for the Philippians? Have you ever had the experience of someone praying specifically for you? How did that make you feel? How does Paul partner with the Philippians? Paul's gratitude for the Philippians' partnership leads Paul to the prayer in 1:9-11. What does he ask God for and what is the ultimate goal? The church is an ideal place to begin practicing the kind of partnership Paul talks about. How can you begin to think and act more like partners with Christians around you at FCC Puyallup? [St. Andrews Presbyterian Church](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Why do you think God chose someone like John to be Jesus' forerunner? How can we be sure that all our personal differences are part of God's plan and purpose? John was raised in the desert. What kinds of circumstances has God used as a training ground for your preparation? How dependent are you upon what others think and say about you? How can you change this without becoming callous? How can guilt be healthy? How can guilt be unhealthy? Why is humbling (such as repentance and baptism in John's day) necessary to form disciples of Jesus? What kind of cutting, filling, straightening, and smoothing work has God been doing in your life? What does he still need to do? [Jesus Walk](#)