

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

December 20, 2020
Advent 4, Year B

The readings this week:

- 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 ◦ Luke 1:47-55
- Romans 16:25-27 ◦ Luke 1:26-38



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

Advent is a tradition in the church of taking time in the weeks before Christmas to set our hearts on Jesus and anticipate His coming. Here in this fourth week of Advent we are still waiting. We continue to hold onto hope. Wait, be alert, because hope is here.

Hope at Christmas

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

Hope of the World

Remember how it felt to be a child on Christmas Eve? You were sent off to bed wearing new red and green striped pajamas. The neighbor's twinkling Christmas lights were peeking through the edges of your curtains. The anticipation of the morning ahead was enough to keep you tossing and turning in your bed for hours. You waited for what felt like centuries, and as soon as daylight peeked into your bedroom, you shot out of bed. Christmas had arrived!

For what was actually centuries, God's people waited for the Messiah. God used Isaiah to foretell of His arrival. He would be born a baby and would rule the nations. His names would display His character. He would be the "Wonderful Counselor" who was here to equip His nation with righteousness. He would be "Mighty God," performing miracles only God is capable of. He would be "Everlasting Father," a distinct figure of the Trinity, yet fully and completely the eternal God. He would be the "Prince of Peace," the sovereign ruler over all nations.

Seven hundred years after Isaiah spoke those words, the angel reminded Mary that God is faithful to do what He says. It's hard to wait a few weeks for Christmas; can you imagine waiting seven hundred years? God's timing is always perfect, though, and the baby was born to a virgin just as promised (Matthew 1:23). He was called Immanuel, which means "God with us"—the most wonderful name of all. God came to be with us; Jesus came to earth, He lived a perfect life, He died an undeserved death, and He rose again. We only have relationship with the Father because of Jesus' life on earth.

Hope for Eternity

Because Jesus came to be with us, God remains with us always. He is here to help us and to lead us in an abundant life on earth. God desires to be involved in our lives, directing and guiding us through His Scriptures. God is our only source of hope; our hope remains because we trust that He is coming back! The Messiah will return to earth to live with us and to rule over all nations. We will be restored to the fullness of His creation and sit as heirs to His kingdom.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us be reminded of the hope that is found in Christ alone. We have waited almost two thousand years for Christ to return, but God is a keeper of His word, and His timing is always perfect. As you gather with friends and family this Christmas, share this truth with all of them. Christ is coming back to take His throne, and those who have placed their faith in Him will be glorified. Just as a child eagerly awaits Christmas morning, let's choose to eagerly anticipate Christ's return! [IF Gathering](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16](#)

How do you respond during peaceful times? In crisis, we tend to cry out to the Lord, but when we are at rest where do we turn our attention? During peace, how does David respond? To what or whom, does he turn his attention? Who is Nathan the prophet? What role will he play in David's life? Does Nathan seek the Lord before responding to David's request? Is God bothered that he does not have a temple? What is God's point by reminding David of God's hand on his life? Is it possible that God is not concerned about a temple made with hands because he is building a temple inside David? God promises to make David a "house." What kind of house is God going to build for David? Does Jesus fulfill all of the promises God makes to David? Can you find the fulfillment of these promises in the New Testament? Are any of these promises not fulfilled yet? [Coffeehouse Five](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Luke 1:47-55](#)

How would you define authentic joy? How is it different than happiness? Reflect on a time when you were joyful, even though you weren't all that happy. Describe the setting of these verses and what you think this experience meant to both women. What is the significance of each statement in Elizabeth's greeting to Mary? How did Mary respond to her greeting? What reason did Mary give for her joy? Why did God choose to bless Mary? Why would God choose to bless you and me? What attributes of God does Mary mention? What contrasts or role reversals does Mary make in this passage? How do these reflect her feelings about God? About herself? How has God caused you to wait upon Him? What lessons have you learned in God's waiting room? How can you find joy in the reliability of God—despite your circumstances? How can you rely upon Him in the face of delay, defeat, or even death? [Coffeehouse Five](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

As if until that moment
nothing real
had happened since Creation
As if outside the world were empty
so that she and he were all
there was — he mover, she moved upon
As if her submission were the most
dynamic of all works: as if
no one had ever said Yes like that
As if one day the sun had no place
in all the universe to pour its gold
but her small room

~ Luci Shaw, [Accompanied By Angels: Poems of the Incarnation](#)

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) gets to the point when he says, "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us."

Here's my way of listening to Eckhart, and my own heart.

Angelic Greeting

Each day
a Presence on the Threshold
announces
"Ave"
and,
"You, (yes, you!) are blessed."
Each day
the angels hold their breath
waiting to hear whether I might say,
"Let it be done according to your Word."

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Romans 16:25-27](#)

Romans 16:25-27 is also a benediction. (Some ancient manuscripts also include verse 24 with its own benediction). What is it that Paul wants them to be established in? Is the mystery spoken of in verse 25 now known or still unknown? What is made known to the nations leading to their obedience? What does Paul wish God to gain? What is one situation in your life right now where God is calling you out of the status quo into his best for you? Are there any ways right now in which you're resisting obeying something God has asked of you? [Foundations for Freedom, Crossroads Church](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Luke 1:26-38](#)

Who do you admire most and what characteristics about them do you admire? What are some characteristics of Mary that stand out to you and why? How do you think Mary must have felt as Gabriel revealed each fact and characteristic of Jesus? Is there anything different about Mary's question and Zechariah's question earlier in the chapter? Why does Gabriel react differently to Mary's questions than to Zechariah? What were some possible issues that might come up in Mary's life when she submits to God's plan? Was Mary's tendency to contemplate and ponder things a strength or a weakness? Why? What if anything does this have to do with her humility and submissiveness to God? What would it take for you to spend more time in reflection and contemplation of God and his will in your life? [Oohelet Web Ministry](#)