



LOVEMUSTACT

Partnerships for Sustainable Education

Waiting for Hope

Advent Meditations 2017

INTRODUCTION

These Advent meditations are presented as an act of love to help us all observe this holy season, to make the most of our waiting, and to sharpen our sense of expectation that we may more fully know the Christ who is coming. We hope they are a help to you.

Each writer was asked to reflect on the daily readings for the day. As expected, they all had wonderfully different perceptions of the word of God. Some of the differences are contextual. Some are deeply personal. The differences themselves have turned out to be one of the greatest graces in the project.

The readings are a service of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library and can be found at <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu//daily.php?year=B>. As the site explains:

The daily readings expand the range of biblical reading in worship and personal devotion by providing daily citations for the full three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary. These readings complement the Sunday and festival readings: Thursday through Saturday readings help prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead; Monday through Wednesday readings help the reader reflect on and digest what they heard in worship.

We are exceedingly grateful to our authors, who were drawn from diverse communities:

The Rev. Michael Fedewa (December 3)	Jenny McConnachie (December 4)
Br. Scott Wesley Borden, OHC (December 5)	The Very Rev. Kurt Dunkle (December 6)
The Rev. Roger Cameron (December 7)	The Rev. Canon Johnnie Ross (December 8)
Matt Kellen (December 9)	The Rt. Rev. Allen Shin (December 10)
Br. Robert James Magliula, OHC (December 11)	The Rev. Jabriel Ballentine (December 12)
The Rt. Rev. Peter Lee (December 13)	Sandra McPhee, Esq. (December 14)
Ntsika Kitsili (December 15)	Br. Daniel Ludik, OHC (December 16)
Br. Timothy Jolley, OHC (December 17)	ZZ Kellen (December 18)
The Rev. Brad Whitaker (December 19)	Kay Collier McLaughlin, PhD (December 20)
The Rev. Patti Welch (December 21)	Kary McConnachie (December 22)
Andrew Wootson Joyce (December 23)	The Rt. Rev. Daniel Gutierrez (December 24)
The Rt. Rev. Stacy F. Sauls (December 25)	

Sunday and daily readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary, Copyright © 1992 Consultation on Common Texts. Used by permission.



Sunday, December 3, 2017 (Advent I)

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7,17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

LO! HE COMES

“Lo! he comes with clouds descending, once for our salvation slain; thousand thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train: Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ the Lord returns to reign.” *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1985) 57.

This morning, many Episcopal churches will begin Advent with this magnificent hymn. At least for me, the entire season of Advent is captured in it.

As Advent begins, it focuses our attention on the coming of Jesus, not yet on the coming of Jesus at his birth. We will get to that soon enough. The focus today is more about the future coming of Jesus, his return. Often, our temptation is to think of this future return of Jesus as an end of the world even—the final glorious moment when God's divine work of redemption is completely accomplished. The moment when "Thou shalt reign and thou alone!" The people of God have been waiting a long time for this. Indeed, all creation is waiting as well.

The Gospel of Mark invites us this morning to wake up, to stay alert, and to keep our eyes open. I believe this is an invitation to see the coming of Jesus not only in the distant past or in the far distant future. Advent is an invitation to see the comings of Jesus in the here and now. Yes, Jesus came in his birth. Yes, Jesus will come at the end of time. Advent celebrates that Jesus is also coming here and now.

We live in a world where many prefer to sleep. There is so much violence, pain, and despair, we too often close our eyes to the suffering of the many. Advent invites us to wake up and see acts of love that are overcoming darkness in the world.

"Lo he comes" today in acts of love. Jesus "returns to reign" today, in acts of love. These acts of love take place when friends embrace and hold on to each other. These acts of love take place in your congregation today when sins are forgiven and peace is exchanged. These acts of love take place in our world today as disciples of Jesus teach and proclaim the Good News of God's Love.

I invite you to begin the Season of Advent by looking for signs of God's love. They are all around us, as close as the people we embrace, as close as the stranger who greets us on the street, as close as the students we teach. Wake up. Stay alert. Rejoice.

Lo he comes today. Christ the Lord returns today. Alleluia!

THE REV. MICHAEL C. FEDEWA
ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN



December 4, 2017

Psalm 79; Micah 4:1-5; Revelation 15:1-8

READING WITH NEWLY OPENED EYES

I have always been somewhat overwhelmed by the Book of Revelation. The extravagance of the imagery, some of which on the surface appear to be pure fantasy, the hard-to-understand images that have to be examined and explained, and it's disconnection with any part of everyday life have meant that I have tended to avoid it.

On reading this passage I began to feel a new appreciation of the book. The image of the seven angels dressed in clean shining linen with golden sashes round their waists but carrying the bowls of plagues, the bowls being filled with the wrath of God, is very powerful.

It brought to my mind the power and extravagance of God when he created our stunningly beautiful world, with its mountains, rivers, trees, and seas with all that is in them, of God wanting to dispose of all the evil in the world, and only us being the ones to prevent this coming to pass.

The fact that God sent the Son to wipe out the evil in the world and give us all the chance to be part of the kingdom God intends is what is described in Revelation.

My eyes have been opened to so something new in an unexpected place. I intend to reread Revelation with those newly opened eyes.

JENNY MCCONNACHIE
NURSE, HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



December 5, 2017

Psalm 79; Micah 4:6-13; Revelation 18:1-10

NOT A SOCIAL VISIT

It is easy, living in contemporary times, to learn everything we need to know about Christmas from our culture. We even learn about Advent – the season that leads us to Christmas. Cultural Advent used to begin not four Sundays before Christmas, but on Thanksgiving. Now it seems to start on Halloween. We can learn about Christmas and Advent, but everything our culture wants to tell us about this blessed time of year is wrong.

The scriptures for today's reflection make clear that Advent is not entirely filled with joyful anticipation. "They have reduced Jerusalem to rubble" is not the stuff of Hallmark cards. "Woe to you ... city of Babylon! Your doom has come!" There is no place in this vision for visions of sugar plums.

In Advent we await the coming of Jesus into our world. And year by year Jesus comes into the real world, not the sentimental world of fantasy. It is not a social visit. Jesus comes because we need Jesus. Our world is filled with injustice and pain. Part of the work of Advent is to take stock of what we have made of this world and prepare for Jesus to come and have a good look.

It is a challenge for me in Advent to remember that there is the world at large, for which I have great feeling, but only little power. And then there is the world within my heart. I'd like to say that the world within my heart is in much better shape because I am in control. I might hold those illusions, but Jesus won't. I'm with Paul – the good I would do I don't do and the wrong I would not do I do. Even so Lord Jesus, quickly come.

The time of Advent may not be filled with joyful anticipation, but it is filled with hope. If we do not have hope, then we do not know the Lord's plan. At the same time, if we think living with Jesus will be easy, then we do not know the Lord's plan.

Babylon the Great is destroyed because it is an illusion. It appears a great and powerful city, but it is nothing. What is my Babylon? What great and marvelous cities have I conjured in my mind? May God's mercy come to meet me, for I am in desperate need.

The promise of Advent is not that it leads to a happy and festive season, though in some ways it does. The deep promise is that Jesus comes and walks with us, alongside of us, above us, behind us, within us. Walking with Jesus, we can walk through anything.

BR. SCOTT WESLEY BORDEN, OHC
HOLY CROSS MONASTERY
WEST PARK, NEW YORK



December 6, 2017

Psalm 79; Micah 5:1-5a; Luke 21:34-38

THE EXPLOSION

It was always difficult to sense when my mother was mad. She was very subtle... until she was not. It would begin with a slightly elongated glance. It might then move to a modicum of jaw-clinching. Then there were the eyes. Or, she would ignore whatever upsetting childhood conduct I was undertaking in hopes it would stop. It would always take a while and usually one of the myriad secret codes would work. I behaved.

But, sometimes I just didn't get it. It took "the explosion." Frankly, in those times, I deserved it. A strong—really strong!—grab of my arm or swift, sharp word or phrase. It was rarely about punishment; she wasn't like that. She wanted me to self-correct. Mostly, the subtle signs did the trick. Occasionally, "the explosion" was necessary.

The Psalmist, Micah, and Luke all conspire across 3000 years to tell us about God's "explosion." No doubt, this is jarring in the middle of the second full week of preparations for Christmas. Shouldn't we be hearing about those subtle signs of love, not the explosions of anger? What happened to Figgy Pudding? Rather, clear warnings about defiling the Holy Temple or condemnations of judges, landlords, and judicial leaders, or "dissipation and drunkenness" fill the readings. Today—like much of Advent—is "the explosion."

God, like my late mother, loves us. There is no question. He loves us all. But, sometimes, we don't pick up on the subtle signs; the extended glances or the clenched heavenly jaw. Periodically, it takes "the explosion." I have not done the math, but I suspect it's about like my mother's ratio. Holy Scripture tells us about love far, far more than wrath and anger. But, sometimes only a good old-fashioned explosion will do.

Sometimes subtle actions suffice. Folks know they are loved, or more importantly, folks practice love. But, sometimes it takes "the explosion." Love Must Act. Or, more viscerally put, Love *Must* Act. The Psalms, Micah, and Luke don't just stop at verses 13, 5, and 38; there's a much longer story. A story of love and God's introduction of love in the form of a person, Jesus, and transmittal of that love-spreading to us.

But, sometimes, we need "the explosion." Advent is like that and today the technique is clear.

THE VERY REV. KURT DUNKLE
DEAN AND PRESIDENT, THE GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK



December 7, 2017

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

MERCY AND LOVE

The prophet Hosea presents us with a judgment on superficial religious actions not grounded in mercy for neighbor and love for God. The Psalmist says that it is when “[m]ercy and truth have met together; righteous and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:11) and that “his salvation is near those who fear him and his glory may dwell in our land” (v. 9).

South Africa, despite its wonderful beginnings under President Nelson Mandela, is presently ruled by a corrupt and greedy president who promotes his own selfish agenda, despite its negative impact on the country, particularly the poor. Our country, in fact the whole world, desperately needs leaders who act like the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul praises them, saying “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” We cannot claim a loving and generous God without this reflecting in our own loving actions.

Our hope is a deep hope in Christ Jesus, the cosmic Lord of the Universe, who existed from before the beginning of time. Our hope is bigger than the present crisis of our world. Our hope is that ultimately, and in God’s own time, Christ will restore our humanity and our world, and the pain, sadness, brokenness, and confusion will be gone. Now we trust in this hope and offer our suffering and the suffering of the world to God, praying that God’s love will hold and sustain us.

Love, in God, needs to be personal and relational. If we are persons who are loved and live in fellowship, in community with others and with God, then we should not fear because love casts out fear. It is this love for one another in Christ that is our witness. This is not just our little communities and our families; it is ultimately the whole world and God’s love that will break down the walls that separate us. Our task is to knock down those walls brick by brick whether these be walls of race, gender, religion or culture. We need to be in loving communities which are not characterized by fear and distrust.

Finally, we need to have faith that God is present, incarnate in our world, despite the suffering, despite the moral failure of our time. We need to have faith that God in us enables us to be “love and faithfulness” and “peace and righteousness” in our society.

May God bless you today as you open your heart to the faith, hope and love which is God’s gift of grace to you. May you see this in your neighbor as you walk with God day by day.

THE REV. ROGER CAMERON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ANGLICAN BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



December 8, 2017

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26

LOVING LIKE GOD LOVES

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you,” writes the prophet Jeremiah.

By week thirteen of a woman’s pregnancy, the American Pregnancy Association reports that some women feel what they describe as a “strong butterfly flapping movement” in their tummy because of the baby they are carrying. Some women report this feeling while the baby is still classified an embryo, that is, during the first trimester. Yet according to Jeremiah, God knew us, felt us, had a relationship with us, even before we arrive in the womb. I’d like to think that, from the very moment the sperm fertilizes the egg, the uniqueness of that act has God’s full and undivided attention. If this be true, then we are, at that zygotic moment, a creature touched by the Divine not to discover life, but to discover love.

What Jeremiah is telling us is, that in the Divine knowing of the sperm fertilizing the egg, God’s excitement is rooted in God’s love for us and the potential we have to love ourselves and others. Therefore, we are not a life brought forth in time, but love brought forth into and out of eternity. A relationship that exists beyond the biological acts and elements of life. A relationship that rests in an eternal embrace. This sort of a relationship, one built on divine love, is more than just a force of nature, it is a force of the divine presence within us as well as in our midst.

In my mind’s eye, I can imagine God’s excitement in this creative moment being not a whole lot different than the excitement God experienced in the Big Bang, or when God first noticed the caring act of one hominoid reaching to comfort another, two or three seeking shelter together, or a community beginning to care for the young and old as if their very existence depended on the life and health of the most vulnerable among them. I loved you before you were you, says God to Jeremiah, and I’m asking you to do the same.

When we act in love, demanding nothing in return and expecting everything, then we are beginning to love like God loves. As a biologist/priest, I understand the cradle of humankind to be more than a place that gave birth to modern humans. The cradle of humankind also gave birth to love, that unique relationship we have with God and one another.

THE REV. CANON JOHNNIE ROSS
CANON TO THE ORDINARY, DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK



December 9, 2017

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33

A NEW HEART, A NEW SPIRIT

We are all called to experience the fullness of life and enjoy the light that love shines on us through our lives from a God who loves the creation. What does it mean, though, to experience the fullness of life, and how do we find the peace of God's love?

Experiencing the fullness of life includes the moments of great joy and intense sadness. It includes the moments of brilliance where we feel a closeness to being part of God's greater plan as well as the daily mundane routines and interactions which breed the question of uncertainty: "What am I doing with my life?"

We all pursue a good life, a life of love, mercy, and justice, and pursue these things for our families, friends, strangers and enemies. It is in moments of uncertainty, and mind-numbing mundane moments in life where we find ourselves lost that we have an opportunity to experience the connection between love and faithfulness, peace and righteousness that Psalm 85 speaks of and the new heart filling of spirit that Ezekiel alludes to.

It is in our moments of uncertainty that we display our faithfulness to the mission of God. We rely on the love of God cultivated in our love of family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and even enemies to keep our faith. In times of uncertainty we can find peace in our resolve to pursue what is righteous no matter how small the step.

Regardless of how we may have failed or succeeded according to the world's eyes, or are failing according to our own standards, we have the privilege to experience a peace and love of a God who only asks that we remain faithful to the good news of grace, peace, and love that transcends all understanding. In these uncertainties, we can keep taking continual steps in knowing what is good, merciful, and just. Christ has shown the way for us in a life full of love but no stranger to persecution, betrayal, and uncertainty.

God plans for us the same fullness of life: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you" (Ezek. 36:26-27).

MATT KELLEN
FORMER YOUNG ADULT SERVICE CORPS VOLUNTEER AT HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON



December 10, 2017 (Advent II)

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

WHAT HOPE CAN RELIGION POSSIBLY OFFER?

When I was Chaplain at Keble College Oxford, I had a conversation with an Irish Catholic student from Northern Ireland. He posed this question When religion has become a catalyst and justification for violence and war, what hope can religion possibly offer to the world to end war and violence and restore peace? It seems that if we got rid of religion altogether, there might be a better possibility for peace today.

To every such criticism of religion, a counter observation and example can be offered. Mother Theresa would be a modern example of goodness of religious faith. Many people do good things in the name of Christ. It is not the religious influence that is intrinsically bad, but the human ingenuity to hide their evil intentions with the religious rhetoric of hatred and fear that is problematic. Religion ought to proclaim hope and faith in God's mercy and love and in the human capacity to transcend evil.

The voice of John the Baptist is an urgent wake-up call. His call to repentance is a call to change inside out, to turn our individual lives around to a right relationship with God and with fellow human beings in the world, to renew the hope of new life of love, justice, and mercy, to revitalize faith in God and in each other. But the process of repentance has to begin from within, within our hearts, within our lives, and within the institutional church.

Repentance presumes our sinfulness both individually in our personal lives and collectively in our common public life. Unless we acknowledge our sinfulness, there is no point of repentance. It would behoove us to be humble before Christ, who alone is without sin. Repentance also presumes a possibility of forgiveness, and with that possibility, hope. If there were no possibility of forgiveness, repentance would be a wasted effort. God's forgiveness is everlasting and, thus, precedes our repentance. God has already offered his forgiveness to us as a real possibility. Repentance, then, is the true response to God's mercy and grace, which is honey to our souls.

There are times when everything seems to go wrong in life and we find our spirit broken and our soul in arid desolation as if locusts have come devoured the green grass of hope. Then, there are those moments of sweet grace when everything seems to click together and our spirit soars to heaven. Locust and honey represent the daily spiritual diet of life we all must take in.

During this Advent why not invite John the Baptist into your prayer life? Why not prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight into your heart and soul? You might just taste the sweet honey of his saving grace when Jesus comes to make his dwelling place in your heart.

THE RT. REV. ALLEN SHIN
BISHOP SUFFRAGAN, DIOCESE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK, NEW YORK



December 11, 2017

Psalm 27; Isaiah 26:7-15; Acts 2:37-42

WHOM THEN SHALL I FEAR?

These first verses of Psalm 27 accompanied me more than any in my ministry with children and youth in South Africa: “The Lord is my Light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?” It’s easy to lose one’s grounding and oneself in fear and powerlessness, especially in working with the most vulnerable.

This was a large part of my seven-year experience in South Africa. I arrived with two strikes against me. I was an American, and Americans believe that they can fix anything, especially in others. Also, I was a seasoned priest convinced I was up to tackling anything. Faced with the dire conditions I found, my ego, fueled by fears and frustrations, insisted on those illusions.

The ego makes life all about achievement and attainment. The spiritual journey, however, is about awakening to not accomplishing. The discovery of our deepest self and the discovery of God are the same discovery. It is who we are in God and who God is in us. Our spiritual path and practice should keep us grounded in this reality.

Over time I discovered that God is to be found in all things, even and most especially in the painful and tragic—exactly where we do not want to look. The only things strong enough to break open the heart are things like pain, mistakes, unjust suffering, tragedy, failure, and the general unpredictability of life. Life has a way of leading us to the edge of our own resources through such events. Faith begins when we are confronted by an experience that we cannot fix, control, or even understand. In the intimate relationship God offers we discover that grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for our survival.

We are all participating—with varying degrees of resistance and consent—in the faith journey that Jesus has already walked. Jesus came to give us the courage to trust and realize the divine within us all. He modeled it for us in the Incarnation by presenting a message of vulnerability and unity. Following Jesus is not a means of creating some ideal social order as much as it is a vocation to love the way that God loves.

It seems that all God wants are useable instruments who will carry the mystery, the weight of glory and the burden of imperfection simultaneously, who can bear the darkness and the light, who can hold the paradox of Incarnation—flesh and spirit, human and divine, joy and suffering—at the same time just as Jesus did.

BR. ROBERT JAMES MAGLIULA, OHC
SUPERIOR OF THE ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS AND FORMER PRINCIPAL OF HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
WEST PARK, NEW YORK



December 12, 2017

Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18

REMAIN!

Christ will come again! Are we ready?

In this season of rampant pedophilia and sexual assault...of rabid White Supremacy and xenophobia...of polarization that has no desire for reconciliation, truly the mythical “New Jerusalem” that American Exceptionalism claims us to be is a filthy place. What are we to do?

Isaiah tells us clearly: remain in the Holy Place (Zion) and City of God (Jerusalem). For if we are able to stand firm, “the Lord shall wash away the filth of the sons and the daughters of Zion” (Isa. 4:4).

We ought rejoice and take comfort that we don’t have to wash ourselves...we don’t have to purge ourselves of the blood that runs through the City...through our Society and Culture and World. What we must do is prepare ourselves—mind, body and spirit—for the Coming One.

We must prepare ourselves for the One who Is coming to separate the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats, the faithful from the wicked. We must prepare ourselves for the One Who Is coming to receive us and welcome us into everlasting joy!

When Christmas is coming, we prepare. But how do we prepare? Do we anxiously prepare, because we aren’t really looking forward to the feast? We aren’t really looking forward to the family gathering or we feel our preparations will somehow fall short—as usual? Or do we prepare with joy and expectation? Do we look forward to the gathering of family and friends and the celebration of joy and love and oneness? Do we prepare for the gathering? Or do we prepare for the accouterments and ambiance of the gathering?

The deeper question is how do we prepare for the Holy Gathering? Are we preparing for that great feast? Are we preparing to gather joyously with friends and family we haven’t seen in a while or have never met? Are we prepared to gather lovingly with those we could never imagine would be at Table with us? Are we remaining in the Holy Place? Or are we being dragged into the mud of division and discord and rancor? Are we simply surrounded by filth? Or are we wallowing in filth, gladly smearing it on our faces and sullyng the image of God in which we are created?

“In that day, the Lord will shine in counsel and glory on the earth, to exalt and glorify those of Israel who remain” (Isa. 4:2). Brothers and Sisters: stand firm in the faith! Prepare your hearts and minds and bodies! That Day is coming!

THE REV. JABRIEL BALLENTINE
PERSONAL PASTOR & PUBLIC THEOLOGIAN, JAHBREAD, LLC
ORLANDO, FLORIDA



December 13, 2017

Psalm 27; Malachi 2:10-31; Luke 1:5-17

A NEW PROPHET IS BORN

There are times when the Lord just revs our engines – Lent and Advent being natural moments.

So like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we may be faithfully pottering along—like them, “righteous and living as blamelessly as we can, according to all the guidelines.”

Then bang, an angel pitches up: some or other messenger of God appears and kicks us into another gear. “Something new is happening and we want you to be in the know, so you can help the process and enjoy seeing God at work.”

Then all the old patterns start to change: there is a new child in the house, noise and disruption, sleepless nights, school lifts, and varsity fees. Like the old man, we can be struck dumb by the sheer pace of change.

Many years ago, in his book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler observed that churches are classic victims of “museum syndrome”; when change threatens, we start creating spaces of comfort and familiarity, full of old-smelling books and flower vases, to assure our customers that all is well while the wind is howling outside the stained-glass windows. But while we want to assert the unchanging truths, we sometimes abandon deep convictions while hanging onto the non-essentials.

God meanwhile is not too bothered about defending the divine permanence; God is rather in the change business, shaking up the people and calling us to pack for the journey. While comforting the disturbed, God surely disturbs the comfortable.

“You have wearied the Lord’s ears,” said the prophet Malachi (2:17), reckoning that God gets tired of hearing us whining while not listening to God’s side of it.

So now a new prophet is born, through the faithfulness of his folk and despite their unreadiness. He will face the same frustrations as the old ones, but persevere nonetheless. So look out for the angels of Advent: they may speak of hat we know not and call us to mobilize.

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart, and wait for the Lord.” (Ps. 27:14)

THE RT. REV. PETER LEE
BISHOP EMERITUS, DIOCESE OF CHRIST THE KING
CHAIR, ANGLICAN BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



December 14, 2017

Psalm 126; Habakkuk 2:1-5; Philippians 3:7-11

JOYOUS ANTICIPATION

For me, the most compelling emotion of the Season of Advent is that of anticipation—joyous anticipation. Each year, Christians await the renewed celebration of the birth of the Messiah in the shape and form of a tiny, helpless child. As twenty-first century American Christians, we also anticipate the social and commercial holiday season, stretching from Halloween to New Year's Day. Coming to a head these first weeks of December, we celebrate, with varying degrees of joy, holiday parties, special concerts and events, shopping, travel, winter weather, traditional meals, meaningful worship, and most blessed, special, valuable, sacred time with our dearest family and friends.

The lessons selected for today all deal with joyous anticipation, with restoration, and with righteousness. Psalm 126 is a psalm of thanksgiving, of anticipation and joy. Joy, spontaneous and uncontrolled, is mentioned multiple times. In verse 4, the psalmist prays to the Lord to "restore our fortunes," to make everything good and new and joyous again. During Advent, we pray to God to restore our joy, too.

The passage from Habakkuk also focuses on joy but this is the joy that will come with patient and confident waiting. In verse 3, "the revelation awaits an appointed time." The revelation could be understood as the coming of the Messiah, God's most concrete and important revelation to his people. Verse 4 evokes the quiet, subtle joy of the righteous person who "will live by his faithfulness."

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul, too, speaks of righteousness, or of "right-ness." For Paul, righteousness comes only from God and is based on faith. The "right-ness" of faith in God, and the desire to know Christ and to comprehend the power of the resurrection overrules all other desires and needs. In spite of worldly difficulties, the joy of the sure and certain knowledge of faith in Jesus and faith in his resurrection are all that is needed. And that faith and knowledge, in anticipation of our own death and resurrection, is the greatest joy.

So, back to Advent. This season of joyous anticipation and of preparation for the renewed celebration of the birth of Christ and for our own celebrations with our dearest family and our closest friends. As we anticipate the coming birth of Christ and await the end of one year and the beginning of a new one full of promise, we focus on hope and joy. This is the season where the "right-ness" of our faith holds and prepares us for the arrival of God in the form of Christ who makes all things new and whose faith in us and ours in him brings joy that is quiet and profound.

SANDRA MCPHEE, ESQ.
BOARD MEMBER, LOVE MUST ACT
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS



December 15, 2017

Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:2-6; Philippians 3:12-16

“HIS POWER IS JUST THE SAME AS ALWAYS!” (HAB. 3:6)

The world stood in awe as it watched Zimbabweans take to the streets in celebration of Robert Mugabe’s announcement of his resignation. “What amazing things the Lord has done for them,” (Ps. 126:2), outsiders must have thought as the media recorded Zimbabweans singing, dancing, and laughing in their celebrations. The Zimbabweans that were interviewed on the streets describe the moment as if “it was like a dream” (Ps. 126:1), an answered prayer after 30 years of hoping to be set free and delivered from their harsh president who persecuted anyone who dare speak against him or challenge his governance.

I have been thinking a lot about the ordinary Zimbabwean Christians, those who didn’t leave Zimbabwe, those who suffered and endured the pain of the Mugabe regime. I have no doubt in my mind that these ordinary Zimbabweans silently prayed for change and fought for fairness, justice, and an end to violence, corruption, and greed in their country, in their own homes, and in their communities that we will never know of or hear about.

Their faith in God remained unshaken by the actions of those in power.

I have no doubt that it was not easy. God is faithful and always delivers on God’s promises. The book of Habakkuk testifies to this: “[I]n this time of our deep need, begin again to help us, as you did in years gone by. Show us your power to save us,” (Hab. 3:2). In the letter to Philippians, Paul and Timothy encourage Christians in Philippi to hold on to their faith, and to Jesus Christ’s teachings, until they reach “the end of the race” (Phil. 4:14) where our prize is waiting for us in heaven.

I cannot imagine what it must have been like living in Zimbabwe under the circumstances they have been living under. So many brothers and sisters in Christ held onto faith and prayer that their powerful, loving God will bring them salvation.

This is what I learnt. God is faithful and “his power is just the same as always” (Hab. 3:6). In the midst of all the instability, economically and politically, in our world let us not allow that which distracts us from what we are called to be, and what Christ wants us to be and do, which is to love one another as he loves us and to serve each other as he has done. When we focus on serving one another God will bring us back from exile and, those from outside, will watch us in awe and say, “what amazing things the Lord has done for them.”

NTSIKA KITSILI
LECTURER, RHODES UNIVERSITY
GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



December 16, 2017

Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:13-19; Matthew 21:28-32

THE DAY OF RECONCILIATION

Here in South Africa, today is our national Day of Reconciliation. During the apartheid years, this was called the Day of the Covenant, a day to commemorate a very bloody battle in our very bloody history. After our first democratic elections in 1994, the day was renamed the Day of Reconciliation, a day with a completely new and different intention.

Sadly, though, as with so many human endeavours, the wonderful reconciliation that was achieved in the early post-apartheid days was squandered through corruption and poor governance. Many people now feel disempowered and disenfranchised.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That may be true, but all actions, good and bad, require intention. Jesus tells a story in today's gospel about a father who asked his sons to go work in the vineyard. One states the intention to go but changes his mind. The other intends not to go, but also changes his mind. In this season of Advent, it reminds of something important. Intentions, good or bad, can be changed. The road everywhere is paved with intentions of some kind. It is our final ones that pave the road to wherever we are going.

Advent reminds us that God has an intention that all people will be reconciled to each other and to God in Christ. God's entry into the world also reminds us that God's intention will not be subverted by the opposite intentions of anyone, including the powerful and privileged. It is, after all, the intention of God that saves us.

I'm reminded of a story told me by a monk years ago. He was newly life-professed, and as is the nature of this life, he went through a very difficult time where he was just bombarded by, as he called it, "the evil one." He went through severe struggles with all the vows, particularly celibacy, and had a tough time praying. Eventually he decided to ask one of the old, wise monks for help. The old guy commiserated and said that most advice would be superfluous; however, he encouraged the younger monk to close his eyes, and to just hold on to Jesus' coattails for dear life, and he would be OK. Well, he sure hung on, because he was a happy monk when telling the story.

I think in these days of seeming uncertainty, political and financial, of rising crime, particularly violent crime, it might be difficult to foresee the joyful culmination of Advent no matter what our intentions are. But if the best we can do is close our eyes and take firm hold of Jesus' coattails, then, that will be enough. Together with the psalmist, our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy.

BR. DANIEL LUDIK, OHC
PRIOR, MARIYA UMAMA WETHEMBA MONASTERY
GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



December 17, 2017 (Advent III)

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

SING A NEW SONG . . . NOW!

“Awake,” cries the Baptist, as he announces the arrival of the new life, the new reality, the new song! Watch out, for the one who is coming will bring with him a baptism not with water, which washes off, but rather with the Spirit, who blows we know not where. John himself was not absolutely certain who this Jesus would be, nor could he say for certain what we could expect when Jesus actually came. He found out soon enough, and it was so powerful that he questioned whether Jesus was the one, or should he expect another. The Spirit is powerful and tricky. Unlike water, which is visible, tangible, and understood, the Spirit is just the opposite. It blows where it will. Yet, with faith we are called to *awaken* to the tune of a new song; to invite the Spirit to teach us how to sing and pray with joy.

In faith, we take a deep breath and plunge, kind of like jumping into a cold swimming pool! We believe God’s promises are true and that we will come up gasping for air, yet refreshed. Or do we? There are many of us who are terrified of such a leap. We watch others, but we cannot bring ourselves to follow. How can we sing a new song if we don’t know the words? How can we live if we don’t understand? How can we trust?

St. Augustine, in his *Commentary on the Psalms* reveals a challenging response to these questions: “Sing the new song, and sing it with your lives, not in words.” The joy of God’s new life is beyond verbal expression. So, how do we sing with our lives? Jesus teaches that when we see him we have seen the one who sent him. (Mark 9:47) And how do we see him? Again, Jesus says, that when we have done this for the least of one of these little ones, we do it to him. (Matt. 25:40). When we, like Jesus, open our lives to the poor, to the marginalized, the children who are abandoned, abused, uneducated, left without hope, we see Jesus. Our lives are changed, we know not how, but they are. Millions of Christians testify to this daily, and we are encouraged to join them. The image of God is restored in us, and the New Song is born in the faces of those we touch, whom we allow to touch us. Imagine! A New Song is as simple as a cup of cold water!

We wait for the coming of God in the person of a baby, in a barn, surrounded by animals and the poor. This alone should be enough to wake us to the truth that God wants all of creation to come alive in the truth that Love is at hand. We only have to wake up, take a deep breath and let it be born in us. Once that birth happens, our only choice is to deliver it!

BR. TIMOTHY JOLLEY, OHC
FOUNDER, HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA



December 18, 2017

Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Ephesians 6:10-17

A RESILIENT SPIRIT

“Those who trust in the Lord are like mount Zion which cannot be shaken but endures forever” (Ps. 125.1). Psalm 125 is more than a comforting psalm for those who have lived it. Trusting in the Lord is the only thing I know how to do well because God has shown me over and over again that God is ever-present and here to carry me. It is God who has caught me as life caused me to fall. When I foolishly chose to jump whilst taking a risk, it is God who has stayed with me in deep failure and despair. God surrounded me with protection whilst growing up in the townships of South Africa and filled me with light and love when working with broken people. To trust didn't come easy at first especially in my youth, especially when the dark days seems endless, but God kept surprising me and consistently showing up for me and my family. God was there when my father died, and my mother was to raise four children alone. God was there when I was eight years old and had my heart broken by my peers for being too dark to play with. God was there when I struggled to become pregnant. God was there when I left my home country in a leap of faith. God was always there.

Having lived a life of service in community development and gone where I've been called to, trusting in the Lord has given me a calm resilient spirit. I think Elisha knew the value of a wondrous spirit and that's why he asks Elijah for his, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit" (2 Kings 2:9). Of all the riches, Elisha knew this would get him closer to God and heaven. In my work, it has been in recognizing people's spirits and seeing God in them that has led me to keep on serving, to empathize with the sick, the lonely, the troubled, and the most vulnerable. I pray that I continue to trust in the Lord and that my heart will be upright as the Psalmist says. I pray that my trust and yearning for an upright heart will help me serve and love God and God's people.

ZZ KELLEN
FORMER MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL, HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON



December 19, 2017

Psalm 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4

AS THE MOUNTAINS SURROUND JERUSALEM

Reflecting on the lessons appointed for today, I am drawn to the dramatic images projected by each of them: unbreakable mountains, the Lord's everlasting existence, a chariot of fire, whirlwinds, miracles of water, and 5,000 responding to the Good News. They are all powerful statements of God's presence among God's faithful people.

What I hear in these images is the strong and everlasting, tangible nature of our God in the midst of real stuff and real people. Our God is a living God and is seen in all of creation. From Psalm 125, we read: "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore" (v. 2).

Did you know that mountains are referenced in the Bible over 570 times? They are often used in the poetic prose found in Scripture to symbolize God relating to God's people, and they also serve as holy sites where God's people gather for strength, guidance, and a reassurance of the presence of God. In today's Psalm, the mountains remind the people of God, past and present, that the love of God is always around us, ever-present and as strong as mountains.

Among many other great things, the work being done by Love Must Act serves as a reminder to those that are often marginalized and underserved that God is ever-present and a strength to God's people. As schools are built, children are surrounded and strengthened by God's presence found in a stable classroom, books and supplies, and most importantly, the presence of their teachers and friends.

"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore." Being strengthened by an education in a loving environment, God's people will thrive and grow.

The work being done by Love Must Act may often seem like it is a matter of moving mountains, but God's presence is always there ready to act in and through the people of God.

THE REV. BRAD WHITAKER
RECTOR, ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE



December 20, 2017

Psalm 125; Malachi 3:16-4:6; Mark 9:9-13

JESUS JUST LEFT, DRESSED IN BLUE SCRUBS

The blonde whirlwind was dressed in blue scrubs, wore running shoes, a stethoscope hanging around her neck, and a million-dollar smile. When the doorbell rang late that dull gray afternoon, my friend Ruby grimaced, and let her caregiver Lolly know that she was in no mood for unexpected visitors. I was the expected weekender.

For a few days we would have hours of familiar talking time, punctuated by the realities of Alzheimer's-induced changes that had transported Ruby to her daughter's house in this small town, and the routine of meds and needs for sanity breaks for all who were living this new chapter. Lolly's delighted "It's Debra!" transformed Ruby's face, replacing the grimace with a smile of anticipation that lit her eyes and brought her upright on the sofa.

Sometimes it is only in reflection that I recognize that Jesus has been among us. Had I been told she was a visiting nurse, and to be prepared for the light....sure. It's a tough time for world-weary believers to hold hope for the beloved community, much less encounter Jesus personally.

But I was there. CNN's relentless drone that matched the gray afternoon receded as between the check of vitals and required health narrative, the energy of points of connection in pieces of four very different stories transformed the afternoon. It was a liturgy I recognized as it moved from the introductory words to diving deep to the soul stuff of the existential questions of those who have struggled to answer, 'who does God intend me to be, all by myself?' Around some intangible but very real shared table we offered each other book titles that mattered, laughter and truth. I'm pretty sure the long-widowed, young Lolly is headed for line dancing with just-divorced Debra come next Wednesday.

And as I close my eyes in my weekend bed, I am reminded that if I am open to where and how the desperately needed Gospel message has a chance to be heard, there is more than enough reason to keep on keeping on, one surprising relationship at a time. It was enough to sustain faith and hope one more day.

KAY COLLIER McLAUGHLIN, PHD
AUTHOR AND FOUNDER, TALKING TOGETHER SEMINARS
LAKE CARNICO, KENTUCKY



December 21, 2017 (St. Thomas Day)

Habakkuk 2:1-4; Psalm 126; Hebrews 10:35-11:1; John 20:24-29

TO BELIEVE IS TO LOVE

The Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle falls each year on this 21st day of December. A mere three days from the eve of our blessed Savior's birth, we are given the story of Thomas and his refusal to believe in the resurrected Christ until he sees and touches Jesus himself.

We are used to hearing about Thomas in the lectionary readings appointed for the 2nd Sunday of Easter. But today, we find ourselves deep into the shadows that define the landscape of Advent. It is the time set aside in the Christian year that slowly envelops the human spirit allowing our deepest longings to emerge. In our gospel today we find Thomas and the other disciples behind closed doors and at night. They are afraid. We are being asked to stay with them too, acknowledging our own fears.

T. S. Eliot wrote, in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the common man,
Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire;
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation
inflicted;
Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God;
Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,
Less than we fear the love of God.

Jesus responds to Thomas with an invitation to touch his wounds saying, "Do not doubt but believe." The word *believe* stems from the old English word *to love*. Perhaps Jesus is teaching us that to believe is to love.

To wait for Christ to come in his fullness is not a passive thing, a pious, prayerful, hopeful thing. On the contrary, to wait for Christ to come in all his fullness is above all else to act in Christ's stead as fully as we know how. To wait for Christ is as best we can to be Christ to those who need us, to be Christ to them most, and to bring them the most we have of Christ's healing and love in action.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

THE REV. PATTI WELCH
CHAPLAIN, THE CATHEDRAL SCHOOL
NEW YORK, NEW YORK



December 22, 2017

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19; Hebrews 1:5-14

TWO SLEEPS AWAY!

Christmas Eve is only two sleeps away! In our family this has always meant we are that much closer to celebrating the birth of Christ on Christmas Eve.

Today's scripture readings reminded me of a very special memory. My mother had followed an old family tradition that told children of the angels that accompanied the Christ Child. Advent was a glorious build up to Christmas, a celebration of the imminent arrival of the Christ child made evident by the visits of his angels on each Advent Sunday. Each time "they" would leave behind slippers filled with hints of things to come: a sprig of a Christmas tree, beautifully iced spice cookies and a tiny gift. Advent Sundays were also family gathering times to light another candle on the Advent wreath, sing Advent hymns and enjoy a variety of Advent cookies. We children got busy making gifts for family members during this time and generally it was a time of giving and sharing – no last-minute dash to the shops for a meaningless gift!

So when my own children arrived, I too tried to follow this tradition and chose to make the coming of Christ our family focus rather than Santa Claus. Our lives were sadly more frenetic than the gentle build up to Christmas on the farm and one Saturday we got home late and I realised I had not baked the special "angel" cookies for the slippers. There was no way out except to get baking and icing and I was too exhausted to do a thorough clean up in the kitchen, but the slippers were ready, all sparkly and magical outside the children's door to be discovered upon waking.

On Sunday morning we were woken up by two stern looking children: "You are the angels!"
"Why?"

"The angel biscuits were made in our kitchen because there are sprinkles and icing on the table!" Oops! The little detectives were told the angels needed somewhere to work and chose us as their base and for a little while longer the magic could be upheld.

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) Are we parents not meant to be the angels who are the "ministering spirits" serving our children? I believe we all have the potential within us to be an angel to someone else and thereby "sing of the Lord's great love for ever" (Ps. 89:1). Christmas is a blessed time to reflect on the gift of Love that God has given us. I miss those nights I sat up late creating something for my children out of sheer love for them. I miss the wonder and awe that went with this time and am saddened by the way consumerism takes the magic of the coming of Christ out of Christmas. Perhaps each one of us can make a small effort to bring some of the wonder back again.

KARY MCCONNACHIE
PRINCIPAL, HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



December 23, 2017

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

AN INVITATION TO BELIEVE

The Gospel appointed today, along with the passage from Judges, has some very distinct undertones of questioning and judgment, fear, confusion, and even doubt. Manoah, the man of Zorah, I have to believe doubted, and was certainly confused that his wife had spoken to a man of God (much less the angel of the Lord), who just so happened to promise that she would no longer be barren. Why were they chosen? Who actually was this man? Now, Judges doesn't say Manoah got down on bended knee and prayed to the Lord with doubt in his heart, but my human nature leads me to believe that he was, indeed, skeptical.

Similarly, in the Gospel, John reaffirms that there also was a myriad of confused, skeptical, and judgmental opinions among the people and certainly some deeply seeded, visceral fear from the Pharisees about Jesus. Who is this man Jesus? Why do the people flock to him? How does he speak so with no education?

To me, these two passages highlight the conflict between what people are seeing and hearing, versus what they have been taught to believe, and perhaps more importantly, what they are feeling. From first glance, and based upon the words of his mouth and meditations of his heart, Jesus certainly looks like the Messiah. But, from what all Jews are taught, the Messiah will not come from Nazareth, and the Messiah will be of the house of David. Of course, we know that Jesus was of the House of David, and that he was born in Bethlehem, but the Pharisees and the masses didn't.

This begs the question: Why are we so skeptical? Why are we afraid to believe?

I believe this Gospel is an invitation. It is an invitation for us to be open, to be still, to quiet our minds, and to open our hearts to believing. And, when we open our hearts to believing, and to Jesus, and the miracle that is the Holy Spirit, the fear, confusion, doubt and worry washes away.

ANDREW WOOTSON JOYCE
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, LOVE MUST ACT
GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



December 24, 2017 (Advent IV)

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm, 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI

In 1850 Dante Rossetti painted *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. It is a provocative expression of creation. It portrays the divine presence and possibility that transcends all knowing. We view the human and eternal, the first word and eternal breath, the Alpha and the Omega.

Rossetti's portrayal of Mary is in stark contrast to previous renderings. Mary is a young teen, neither clothed in resplendent robes nor gazing passively upon the divine. Her hair is ruffled. She is wearing a simple sleeping gown. She is not pondering the question. Mary is stricken and cornered as if shaken. On her face is a countenance of sheer, unadulterated terror. "How, how can this be?"

In a few brush strokes, Rossetti captures our lives in the visage of Mary; fear is colliding with willingness, doubt is at odds with knowing, and "self" is combatting humanity. One notices the Holy Spirit almost hidden in quiet anticipation as if Christ himself is awaiting her response. Pigment captures the unfolding reality of our union with God and the power of that marriage. It is the eternal moment where human and divine meet.

I use this painting since it brings our readings into a uniquely human perspective. Mary is anointed to bear Christ, and we are also called to be the sacred vessels. We are chosen to share Christ with the world. Gabriel is handing Mary a lily, and one bud is left unopened. Is this bud awaiting our grasp? "Don't be afraid; God is with you and nothing is impossible with God."

The essence of Christian life is to abandon the old and become something new. God is continually shattering all previous perceptions and divine interactions. This new covenant is made real through Jesus Christ. It is ours to claim, and like this image of Mary, we often fall back fearful. We keep God at a distance, and fear governs our lives—fear of vulnerability, fear of oneness, and fear of those around us.

The spirit is anticipating, the angel is beckoning, and the Christ is waiting. The hand of God is reaching—say yes. Mary takes what God offers, and it is holy. God is offering us life. We stand at the threshold between fear and freedom. The world is desperately seeking Christ, and we are the vessels.

While Rossetti painted the possibility, we are offered the reality. What is our response? Fear or courage? Death or life? Fear not and say yes. Let us open our lives and bodies to the Holy One. The Son of God is present. New life is waiting.

THE RT. REV. DANIEL GUTIERREZ
BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



December 25, 2017

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20

FALSE ALARM

This Christmas morning I'm thinking about one of the most wonderful things that has ever happened. I know it should be the birth of the Christ Child. In truth, it is the birth of Sophie, my first grandchild, a few weeks ago.

Not unlike this Advent season, and the centuries of waiting and hoping and longing that preceded that holy birth in Bethlehem so many years ago, little Sophie's birth has been long-anticipated. My son and daughter-in-law called us back in the winter. They thought my daughter-in-law was pregnant. Too good to be true, I thought. The home pregnancy tests were ambiguous. The first visit to a doctor confirmed it. False alarm.

My daughter-in-law Jessica knew better. She has quite the instinct for all things motherhood. Soon, they went back to the doctor. Sure enough, she had been right all along.

We waited with a sense of expectation I had never known, marking the weeks Jessica's texts telling us how big the baby growing inside her was. There was the tadpole stage. I was a bit alarmed when they got to the "striped skunk" stage, although somehow that seemed not inappropriate. Then she was Pomeranian-sized.

Finally, on October 18, Jessica started having labor pains. She and my son Andrew went to the hospital. We waited patiently but pensively. Another false alarm. It was a huge disappointment, as ready as we all were to caress her. So we went back to waiting.

We didn't have to wait too much longer. Sophie made her true intention known to end the waiting around 5:00 on the morning of October 29. By 3:00 she was here. Within a couple of hours she was nestled in my arms. Worth every minute of a lifetime of waiting.

Christmas, the first one and every subsequent one, is preceded by false alarms that send us uncomfortably back to waiting. We get an idea of what is to come. But for the big event, we have to wait. And wait. And wait.

Advent may be over, but the waiting is not. We celebrate today and then we go back to it, waiting for the dawn to break, the light to shine, the salvation to come. This year, though, I have a little guarantee of what is coming. Her name is Sophie. She is more than worth all the false alarms.

THE RT. REV. STACY F. SAULS
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, LOVE MUST ACT
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

