

**Pillar Journal**  
**Volume I, Issue I**  
**Advent/Christmas 2017**



## Table of Contents

### **REFLECTIONS**

"Anticipation" – Jon Brown

"Seeing" – Jenna Brandsen

"Advent Means Hope for the Hopeless"

– Andy McCoy

"Singing Carols After the Tree Comes Down"

– Jonathan Gabhart

### **POEMS ON THE ADVENT AND INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

"Advent" – Christina Georgina Rossetti

"Nativity" – John Donne

"Nativity Prayer" – St. Augustine of Hippo

### **SONGS ON THE ADVENT AND INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

"O Come Divine Messiah"

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

"On This Day Earth Shall Ring"

### **FURTHER READING AND LISTENING**

## **Anticipation — Jon Brown**

Miriah, our seven year old daughter, is counting the days: twenty eight, twenty seven, twenty six, twenty five. Each new day is one fewer before Christmas morning. She is so excited. She is the easiest of our 4 daughters to wake up in the morning. All I have to do is say, "Riri, guess how many?" She blinks her eyes, smiles in the pre-dawn light, and says, "twenty six." Miriah feels deeply what the season of Advent invites us to experience: the energy of anticipation.

We're entering into the season of Advent. Advent contains the four Sundays that lead up to Christmas morning. To the liturgical year Advent is the beginning, Advent is like New Years Day, only for four weeks. The word Advent is a latin one that means "to come." Its the season of the year we set our hearts' affection and minds' attention on Christ who came once and who will come again. The season is meant to draw to the surface of our lives a deep anticipation for Christ and his kingdom to come fully and finally for eternity.

Miriah's excited about Christmas morning cinnamon rolls and orange juice and stockings and presents. Advent asks us to allow the anticipation of Christmas morning goodness to launch us into anticipation of a greater kind, a fuller kind. Advent invites us into the anticipation of Christ's coming, not only as an infant child but as king of all the universe. Advent wants us to anticipate the second coming when Christ returns and establishes the kingdom forever. Christmas morning goodness with its cinnamon rolls and presents are best seen as a foretaste of the eternal abundance of God's coming kingdom.

I wonder if there is a way for you to nurture anticipation this advent. Would it be to plan a meal, an outing, a gathering around Christmas that would bring you joy? Could it include the removal of something in your life you love, a little like Lent only for a different purpose? What about creating time and space after a busy holiday season to relax with the ones you love? Is it possible to create space this advent season to nurture anticipation? The thing set aside meant to nurture anticipation is a foretaste, a sign pointing to the deeper, fuller anticipation for which this season calls. Children seem to get this better than the rest of us, they feel deeply the purpose of Advent. I wonder if its possible to invite them to see their anticipations for Christmas morning are best meant pointing to a deeper anticipation and I wonder if its possible for the rest of us to join them in the anticipation.

I'd love to hear what your come up with.

Peace to you.

**Pastor Brown**

## Seeing — Jenna Brandsen

We're all waiting; we're all longing. We celebrate Christmas on December 25, but the Christian tradition has given a heavy emphasis to the "waiting" that comes before that day of celebration; it recognizes the human longing that we identify as our ache for Christ. We call it, Advent. However, if you're Christian or not, celebrate Advent or not, the longings we all intrinsically have as humans are there, named or not.

Many of us use our sense of sight to help mark the days of the season. A wreath with five candles to light. A calendar with pictures or figurines to look at (or maybe, if you're really lucky, chocolate, which transcends just the sense of sight). Space on social media accounts for Advent, in photos or writing.

I've even seen Advent momentum extending past the walls of the church in different kinds of calendars: one with a small bottle of wine for each day (like chocolate, transcending sight alone), another simply containing photos of scantily clad women. And as the larger culture continues to pick up on the idea of Advent with—unique, shall we say—ways to mark the passing of its time, to me it's a reminder that every human longs to see Christ, whether they identify it as such or not. Hence, the unique Advent calendars: waiting, longing, for something.

We long for Christ. To see Christ; see Christ in a manger on Christmas Day, and to be seen by Christ in our lives where the brokenness or loneliness or pain feels all-consuming. For indeed Christ, the one we look and watch and wait for, came to see us.

My role at Pillar is Pastor of Congregational Care and Mission. One of many connection points I find between these two facets of ministry is that very thing—sight, seeing. When we consider our own longings to know and be known, see and be seen by Christ, I also wonder if there are there other ways during this season that we can actively recognize this longing in and for the world.

So this season I'm curious. Do you show up to church on Sunday morning with the mindset to see those who might be longing for just that? You could choose to speed quickly through the foyer to and from your pew before and after the Sunday service, or you could take the space to look, to see the others around you, in all of their created beauty and also felt brokenness.

And to take it further, vocationally, missionally; what about as you go to work or school or shopping or jogging; where are the others around you with that same longing to be seen? Who might be waiting, longing to see and be seen by Christ—whether or not they name it as such—and is there space where you might be invited to participate in that action?

This is where my heart feels pulled this Advent. And maybe yours, too, as we wait to see Christ on Christmas morning all the while being seen by him along the way.

**-Pastor Jenna**

## **Advent Means Hope for the Hopeless — Andy McCoy**

Advent is a season of hope and expectation. Perhaps no time of year steers our collective imaginations towards hope more than preparing for Christmas. In our broader culture, the expectation of giving and receiving gifts (especially for children) under the tree on Christmas morning remains the prime example. All kinds of traditions are changing, but most people—Christian or not—wouldn't dream of messing with this tradition, and this experience shapes our understanding of expectation in formative, even visceral, ways. As Christians, we know Jesus is the reason for the season, but we remember our childhood experience of Christmas morning in our gut.

So...what do you really expect with the coming of Christmas? Many of us, if we are honest, just don't feel the all-out excitement that we did as children living in the hope of Christmas morning. I remain unconvinced this is simply a natural result of growing up. After all, shouldn't the giving of gifts bring us joy? Nor do I believe this lack of joy results from a true Christian maturity that should make us more than a little concerned about the commercialization of gifts at the holiday. Don't we already know that Jesus bring us greater joy than any gift we could buy?

I suspect the problem lies, unsurprisingly, deeper. A truthful look at our hearts often reveals how little we really expect of God, and nothing throws that into relief like the holidays. Precisely because the coming of Christmas is all about joyful expectation, this "most wonderful" time of the year makes our struggle to hope in God more acute. In short, hope hurts more because this is a time of year we are supposed to be hoping, and not hurting. We know this is true if we are already struggling. In a culture that prides itself on personal well-being and material abundance, loneliness easily increases around the holidays if you are single, grief over the passing of loved ones feels deeper, sickness aches more, and few things feel more degrading or helpless than being unable to provide Christmas presents

for children because money is tight or a job has been lost. For those who are hurting at Advent, there is little interest in faking hopefulness. Through the lights and colors and sounds of the season, we may ask the really hard question: if God is with us, then where has He gone?

What about the many of us who are living in plenty and not want this year? Strangely, we may be even worse off. At least those who are hurting are honest. When we can't avoid pain, our struggle to hope in God becomes quite clear. But there are myriad ways to avoid pain in our culture, and at this time of year our self-sabotage in sin ramps up quickly. We easily eat or drink too much, we try to buy our way into our loved one's lives through gifts, we work hard to make up for all the days we worked too much, we give ourselves to bad relationships with people and things because it means, at least, relationship with something. Below the surface of our put-together exteriors, lie the deep wants, wishes, hopes, and needs of our hearts. We would do anything to have God meet us in these places. If God would bring us redemption here, we know it would be like being a kid on Christmas morning all over again. It might even be better. But we tend to believe this is too much to ask for, even at Christmas. Too much to hope for, even for God.

Friends, this is a lie told straight from the kingdom of darkness. The season of Advent stands against this lie. Hope is not impossible, but hope is humbling. Hope is vulnerable. God's hope for all things in the universe comes to us as a baby. The original edition Christmas morning wasn't cozy, shiny, and well-wrapped. It was a smelly, dank, exhausted affair resulting from childbirth outside where animals were kept. It came after a long journey to Bethlehem, and the even longer journey of a teenage pregnancy that threatened to destroy a marriage before it began. Advent is our journey to this hope. When the Church celebrates Advent year in and year out, we celebrate a God who makes the journey to meet us where we are. God means to rule our world, our lives, and our hearts, even in the gritty and tender places we keep hidden. Even in the places where we feel so hopeless that we can't admit it to ourselves.

The Gospel of John explains why we celebrate Advent: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. We light candles at this time of year because we know there is darkness, but we also know there is more. What do you expect from the God who provides more this Christmas? This may be the first year you and your family will open presents knowing that a loved one lost will never be with you again in this life. This may be simply another year in a long-line of many when you have to contemplate getting up on Christmas morning in a home by yourself. There may be so much going on during the holidays that you are tempted to feel like you have no time to breathe. Don't fall for this temptation. The God who has given you life and breath is the same God who knows what it means to begin breathing as a baby. That first breath, for every human, is always a cry. If you need to do Advent through tears, then remember that is where God began Christmas. But don't forget that this is also the beginning of every hope in God. Don't forget that the coming of this child means the coming of God's kingdom on earth. Don't forget that, through Jesus, God intends to make all things new.

Advent means hope for the hopeless.

## **Singing Carols After the Tree Comes Down – Jonathan Gabhart**

After our Advent waiting comes our Incarnation celebrating. We celebrate that the word became flesh, we rejoice that God became like we are so we might become like he is as Athanasius, a bishop in the early church, put it. Our songs of "O Come, Emmanuel" turn into choruses of "Glory to the newborn King!" Its Christmas!

And the Christian church has built Incarnation celebration into a whole season, not just one day. Its called Christmastide, the twelve days from Christmas until Epiphany, where the Church celebrates the revelation of the incarnate Jesus to the Magi. These twelve days are set aside to dwell in the story of the incarnation, to praise and give thanks to God for his grace in sending his Son Jesus, and to celebrate what Jesus' incarnation means for our lives and for the world.

Which all sounds great, but sometimes it can seem a little weird to keep singing our beloved Christmas carols and hearing the good news of the Incarnation when it seems like Holiday momentum is losing steam all around us. Maybe you traditionally take your tree down in that week before the New Year. And perhaps you notice that the Holiday decorations in shops and businesses are giving way to other seasonal decor. And you probably already watched Home Alone 2: Lost in New York so how could anyone be expected to try and keep up the "Christmas spirit" once the day is over and done with.

As I look at it, it does seem a little strange at times, but that is one of the delights of Christmastide and the liturgical calendar in general. It helps us orient our lives toward God by the things we do, songs we sing, and sermons we hear. It guides us through the world to show us that Christmas is not a commodity to profit from, but rather that Christmas is about a God to worship, a child who became king. Christmas is a proclamation of everlasting peace that will echo throughout the whole world until Christ comes again for his second Advent to fulfill all that has been promised from generation to generation. Christmas is about the redemption of the whole world in the name of Jesus.

The Church's celebration of Christmastide is a sign that God's promises go far beyond our decking the halls and our fire-roasted chestnuts. Those aren't bad practices in and of themselves, and in many cases our cultural practices around the holidays do a great job of bringing family and friends together this time of year. But the church celebrates the season of Christmas for all those who are longing for something more, who are yearning for family connection, who are hoping for restoration of relationships, who need to hear promises that God loves them, who can take refuge in the God who became a child in order that we might, like children, approach God with wonder and awe for what he has done for us.

"A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

Christmastide proclaims a thrilling hope. So go ahead, keep singing "Oh Holy Night" for all the twelve days of Christmas. It'll be fun. And the world needs it.

**POEMS ON THE  
ADVENT AND INCARNATION  
OF JESUS CHRIST**

## **“Advent”**

### **Christina Georgina Rosetti**

This Advent moon shines cold and  
clear,

    These Advent nights are long;  
Our lamps have burned year after  
year,

    And still their flame is strong.  
“Watchman, what of the night?” we  
cry,

    Heart-sick with hope deferred:  
“No speaking signs are in the sky,”  
    Is still the watchman’s word.

The Porter watches at the gate,  
    The servants watch within;  
The watch is long betimes and late,  
    The prize is slow to win.

“Watchman, what of the night?” but  
still

    His answer sounds the same:  
“No daybreak tops the utmost hill,  
    Nor pale our lamps of flame.”

One to another hear them speak,  
    The patient virgins wise:

“Surely He is not far to seek,”--

    “All night we watch and rise.”

“The days are evil looking back,  
    The coming days are dim;

Yet count we not His promise slack,  
    But watch and wait for Him.”

One with another, soul with soul,  
They kindle fire from fire:

“Friends watch us who have touched  
the goal.”

    “They urge us, come up higher.”

“With them shall rest our waysore  
feet,

    With them is built our home,  
With Christ.” “They sweet, but He  
most sweet,

    Sweeter than honeycomb.”

There no more parting, no more  
pain,

The distant ones brought near,  
The lost so long are found  
again,

Long lost but longer dear:  
Eye hath not seen, ear hath not  
heard,

Nor heart conceived that rest,  
With them our good things long  
deferred,

With Jesus Christ our Best.

We weep because the night is  
long,

We laugh, for day shall rise,  
We sing a slow contented song  
And knock at Paradise.

Weeping we hold Him fast Who  
wept

For us,--we hold Him fast;  
And will not let Him go except  
He bless us first or last.

Weeping we hold Him fast to-  
night;

We will not let Him go  
Till daybreak smite our wearied  
sight,

And summer smite the snow:  
Then figs shall bud, and dove  
with dove

Then figs shall bud, and dove  
with dove

Shall coo the livelong day;  
Then He shall say, "Arise, My  
love,

My fair one, come away."

## **"Nativity"**

**John Donne**

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,  
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,  
There He hath made Himself to His intent  
Weak enough, now into the world to come;  
But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?  
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,  
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent  
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.  
Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He  
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?  
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,  
That would have need to be pitied by thee?  
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,  
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

## **Nativity Prayer**

**St. Augustine**

Let the just rejoice,  
    for their justifier is born.  
Let the sick and infirm rejoice,  
    For their saviour is born.  
Let the captives rejoice,  
    For their Redeemer is born.  
Let slaves rejoice,  
    for their Master is born.  
Let free men rejoice,  
    For their Liberator is born.  
Let All Christians rejoice,  
    For Jesus Christ is born.

**SONGS ON THE  
ADVENT AND INCARNATION  
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O Come, Divine Messiah  
Song of Zechariah (Luke 1)

Text: M. l'abbé Pellegrin (1663-1745)  
Trans: Sister Mary of St. Phillip (1877)

Music: Andy Bast (2016)

F Bb/F F/A Gm Dm

O come, div-ine Mes - si - ah, The world in sil-ence waits  
O come in peace and meek-ness For low-ly will you be

Bb/F F/A Gm F

When hope shall sing its tri-umphs And sad-ness flee aw - ay.  
Though clothed in hu - man weak-ness We shall your God-head see.

Bb/F F/A Gm Dm

O come dis-ired of na-tions, Whom priest and pro-phet told,  
O come, div-ine Mes - si - ah, The world in sil-ence waits

Bb/F F/A Gm Dm

Will break the cap - tive fet - ters Re - deem the long lost fold.  
When hope shall sing its tri-umphs And sad-ness flee aw - ay.

F Bb Dm

Come to the earth, Come to the earth Dear Sa - vior, Hastel!—

F Bb

Dis - pel the night, Dis - pel the night and show your face,—

27 C Gm F Bb

Bid us hail the dawn of grace.

# On This Day Earth Shall Ring

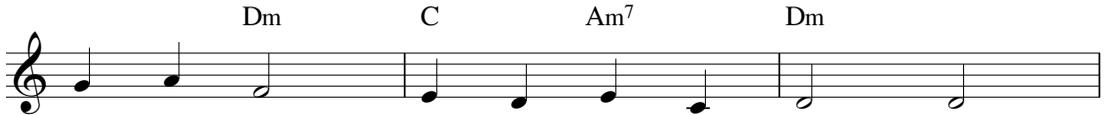
Text: Piae Cantiones, 1582;  
 trans Jane M. Joseph  
 Tune: from Piae Cantiones, 1582;



1. On this day earth shall ring  
 2. His the doom, ours the mirth;  
 3. God's bright star, o'er his head,  
 4. On this day an - gels sing;



with the song chil - dren sing to the Lord,  
 when he came down to earth, Beth - le - hem  
 Wise Men three to him led; kneel they low  
 with their song earth shall ring, prais - ing Christ,



Christ our King, born on earth to save us;  
 saw his birth; ox and ass be - side him  
 by his bed, lay their gifts be - fore him,  
 hea - ven's King, born on earth to save us;



him the Fa - ther gave us.  
 from the cold - would hide him.  
 praise him and a - dore him.  
 peace and love he gave us.



Glo - ry to the Fa - ther, glo - ry to the



Son, glo - ry to the Ho - ly Ghost, to the three in one.

## For Your Reading and Listening Enjoyment

### Books/Devotionals

- *Light Upon Light: A Literary Guide to Prayer for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*  
by Sarah Arthur
- *God is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas*  
by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Rise Up, Shepherd! Advent Reflections on the Spirituals*  
by Luke Powery

### Music for Listening

- “Good News” by Ordinary Time (Original and traditional Advent/Christmas songs in a folk style)
- “Songs for the Incarnation” by Cardiphonia (contemporary arrangements of congregational Incarnation songs by various artists and songwriters across the US)
- “Fear and Rejoice O People: Music for Advent and Christmas” by the Choir of St. John’s College, Cambridge. (a collection of wonderful “lesser-known” Advent/Christmas hymns and chorales)
- “The 25th Day of December” by the Staple Singers (Incredibly fun versions of both original and classic Christmas tunes by the legendary gospel/blues ensemble)