**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for Advent 2020**

**December 20, 2020 – Fourth Sunday of Advent**

*“When your star rises deep within,
Trust yourself to its leading.
You will have the light for first steps.”*

(Sister Raphael Considine in her poem “[Trasna](https://jpbennett.tumblr.com/post/62495573715/trasna-by-raphael-considine-pbvm)”)

**TECHNICAL CHECK-IN (Betty Thompson)**

I’m Betty Thompson and I welcome you here on behalf of Solidarity with Sisters.

* We sent the files of readings, responses, and lyrics.
* Camera, Gallery/Speaker view. Second screen? Mute/unmute, even during singing.
* **I will now mute everybody.** Unmute to speak.

Now let’s put technical things aside.

**WELCOME (Betty)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Mary Ott for preparing today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Joan and Stu Sklamm for lighting their Advent wreath with us this week.
* Thanks to Reggie Ott, Stu Sklamm, Linda Donaldson, and Pat Campbell for leading our music.
* Thanks to others who will also be reading and leading us in prayer today: Suzie De Quattro, Gail DeGeorge, Martha Castro, Charlotte Cook, Bill Fanelli, Kathleen Cross, Richard McGinnis, and Anne Regan.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Suzie De Quattro)**

Advent asks us to find out what happens when light dawns and God comes alive in us. And that begins in quiet. So I invite you to settle into a comfortable position. Feel any tightness in your body and let your muscles loosen. Notice your thoughts and try to put aside those that distract you. Notice your breath as it goes in and out. As you exhale, let tensions leave you. As you inhale, feel God’s love flowing through you. And now let’s take 3 deep breaths. One to be here… one to be together….and one to create space for God.

Now let us welcome the radiant light of God into ourselves and into any darkness that may be around us.

**OPENING AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH (Stu Sklamm and Linda Donaldson, and Joan and Stu Sklamm)**

Stu: O Beloved, Word made flesh, we cry!

Linda (and all, muted): Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu: O Beloved, dwell with us, we cry!

Linda (and all, muted): Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu: O Beloved, full of grace, we cry!

Linda (and all, muted): Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Stu: O Beloved, grace on grace we cry!

Linda (and all, muted): Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

**Sklamms:** Please join us in lighting your Advent candles. (Light candles.) We pray:

God of light, be with us in darkness. Bring light into our world.

**Linda** (and all, muted): Rejoice! Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Suzie De Quattro)**

Beloved Community, we come together in Advent because it is with each other that we are able to keep watch in the darkness… to prepare the way… to recognize the Spirit among us… and to announce the good news of Emmanuel, God with us. We come together to celebrate the great fact that God is in love with us. And so we pray: Emmanuel, God with us, we give you this next hour with confidence that you will act in us and through us. We believe that you will give us light for our next step. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Mary Ott)**

This Advent we continue to ponder in what ways we share with Mary in her pregnancy and in the birth of Jesus. And to wonder what God hopes will be born in us and through us. How do we together incarnate God’s life in the world? We don’t need a full answer. God’s birth in us happens constantly, endlessly.

Today’s gospel reading tells the story of the Angel Gabriel’s visit to the adolescent girl Mary in Nazareth. We have heard this story many times, but it is still marvelous. We also learn that Mary’s cousin Elizabeth (who lives near Jerusalem) is six months pregnant with a son. The theme for week four of Advent is the Annunciation, with the addition of a brief recounting of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth.

As Denise Levertov wrote in her poem “Annunciation,”

*She was free*

*to accept or to refuse, choice*

*integral to humanness.*

*….*

*Called to a destiny more momentous*

*than any in all of Time,*

*she did not quail,*

 *only asked*

*a simple, ‘How can this be?’*

*and gravely, courteously,*

*took to heart the angel’s reply,*

*the astounding ministry she was offered.*

*….*

*This was the moment no one speaks of, when she could still refuse.*

*A breath unbreathed,*

 *Spirit,*

 *suspended,*

 *waiting.*

*….*

*Bravest of all humans,*

 *consent illumined her.*

*….*

*Consent,*

 *courage unparalleled,*

*opened her utterly.*

Now Gail DeGeorge will read from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. Then Martha Castro will offer questions for our reflection, and you might stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1-** Luke 1:26-35. **(Gail DeGeorge)**

The angel Gabriel was sent from God

to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,

to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David,

and the virgin’s name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.”

But she was greatly troubled at what was said,

and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary,

for you have found favor with God.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,

and you shall name him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,

and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,

and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever,

and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

But Mary said to the angel,

“How can this be,

since I have no relations with a man?”

And the angel said to her in reply,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born

will be called holy, the Son of God.”

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**   **(Martha Castro) (Betty:** Start Slide 1

just after Martha begins speaking:

Fra Angelico’s *Annunciation* fresco.**)**

The poem *Annunciation* portrays “a moment no one speaks of, [a moment when Mary] could still refuse.”

When have you been called to cooperate in God’s plan, even though you didn’t know where it would take you?

What can you do to better hear the plan God has for you?

**SILENCE** (Slide 2. Sound a chime and stop Slide 2 after 2 minutes.)  **(Betty)**

**INTRO TO READING 2 (Mary Ott)**

When Mary learned that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, she decided to go visit her at her home near Jerusalem. The distance she traveled was over 60 miles each way—probably a four-day or longer journey on foot. This was a great act of generosity. We don’t know how long Mary stayed with Elizabeth, but we do know that Elizabeth was aware that Mary was carrying a child who was the Lord. It must have been a joyful experience for Mary and Elizabeth to be able to discuss their pregnancies, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future of their sons.

Now Charlotte Cook will continue reading from the 1st chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel. Then Martha Castro will offer questions for our reflection, and you might stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 2-** Luke 1:36-40. **(Charlotte Cook)**

“Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age,

and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;

for nothing will be impossible for God.”

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.”

Then the angel departed from her.

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill

country of Judah. She went into Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**   **(Martha Castro) (Betty:** Slide 3**)**

Both the pregnancy of Mary and that of Elizabeth were announced by the angel Gabriel. Both pregnancies were kept secret for periods of time, probably lonely times for each woman.

Does anything feel barren to you this year? If so, what do you need so that barrenness is replaced with fruitfulness?

How can you assist single parents and women in difficult pregnancies?

**SILENCE** (Slide 4. Sound a chime and stop slide after 2 minutes.)  **(Betty)**

**Betty:** Now Bill Fanelli will lead us in sharing reflections.

**SHARING TIME (Bill Fanelli)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened to and reflected upon these readings. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening,

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [Long pause]

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

Is there anyone else who would like to share? [Pause.]

And/or: 11:22 PM – I am sorry to say that we will have to bring our spoken sharing to an end.

Thank you. Now Greg and Pat Campbell will lead us in prayer.

**COMMUNITY PRAYERS (Linda Donaldson, Campbells) (Betty:** Slide 5**)**

**Greg:** Let us pause and gather the prayers that are rising in us, as we wait on the Lord.



**Betty:** Show Slide 5 while Linda sings.

**Linda:** Contemplative musical meditation: Wait on the Lord whose day is near. Wait on the Lord. Keep watch, take heart. (Repeat for about 45-50 seconds.)

**Greg:** Now let us pray.

**Pat (sung):** Come quickly, Lord, in mercy, come.

**Greg:** God within us, we savor your growing presence. Help us to share the good news!

**Pat** (and all, muted): Come quickly, Lord, in mercy, come.

**Greg:** God among us, thank you for those who welcome your call to a life committed to knowing your presence among people who are poor, marginalized, or unseen. With the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, may we ground our solidarity in your Gospel. For this we pray.

**Pat** (and all, muted): Come quickly, Lord, in mercy, come.

**Greg:** God beyond us, shine in our darkness and make us your light. For this we pray.

**Pat** (and all, muted): Come quickly, Lord, in mercy, come.

**Greg:** For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

[Shared prayers]

**Response to each (sung by Pat, and by all, muted):** Come quickly, Lord, in mercy come.

When prayers become less frequent – **Greg:** Would anyone else like to offer a prayer? [30 sec.]

**Greg:** Thank you. O God, we will do all we can to make our prayers real, and we entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Mary Ott, Kathleen Cross)**

**Mary:** Each of us has traditional ways of Advent preparation. Today Kathleen Cross will speak about her tradition.

**Kathleen:** [1-2 minutes – the tradition and its value as I prepare for Christmas.]

**Mary:** Knowing all that we have received from God, let us now take time to name within ourselves something we will do this week to crate space for God’s coming in us and in the world. [Pause.]

In thanksgiving for the presence and power of Jesus Christ, and in unity with the Holy Spirit, let us pray. God of abundance, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Richard McGinnis)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in us. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet.

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. [Pause.]

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence. [Pause.]

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Anne Regan)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

**All (muted):** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Mary Ott)** (**Betty**: Slide 6: snow in the city of Nazareth)

This Advent-time

we remember Mary and Joseph,

giving thanks for their faithfulness,

courage and obedience,

stepping out into the unknown

in the strength of your Spirit,

playing their part

in the fulfilment of your plan

to bring your prodigal people

home again.

We pray that their example

might be the pattern of our lives,

that when your gentle whisper

breaks through the clamour of this world

and into our small corner,

we might be ready to listen,

and having listened, to act.

Amen.

**CLOSING SONG – People, Look East (Reggie Ott)** (**Betty:** Slide )

“Unicorn Glacier, Tatoosh Range, Washington”

Verse 1: People, look east. The time is near

Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.

Verse 2:

Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,

One more seed is planted there:

Give up your strength the seed to nourish,

That in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the rose, is on the way.

Verse 5:

Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
With the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the Lord, is on the way.

**RESOURCES:**

*Annunciation* by Denise Levertov, A Door in the Hive (W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1989)

Fourth Sunday of Advent | USCCB https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122020.cfm

Image of *The Annunciation* fresco by Fra Angelico in the convent of San Marco in Florence, Italy: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annunciation\_(Fra\_Angelico,\_San\_Marco)#/media/File:ANGELICO,\_Fra\_Annunciation,\_1437-46\_(2236990916).jpg

*The Visitation* sculpture at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Maryland: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\_John\_the\_Baptist\_Catholic\_Church\_(Silver\_Spring,\_Maryland)#/media/File: St.\_John\_the\_Baptist\_SSMD\_04.JPG. Edited by Mary D. Ott.

*A Door between Words* image © by Jan Richardson. Digital copy purchased.

Prayer from Advent 2020P An Advent like no other.

*Snow in the city of Nazareth*, photo by Andrew Faraha: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/google\_map\_Nazareth.htm.

*People, Look East* by Eleanor Farjeon

*Unicorn Glacier, Tatoosh Range, Washington*, etching by Mary D. Ott