

THEN SHALL THEY SEE MEDITATIONS FOR ADVENT



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Anglicans for Renewal and Ancient-Future Faith Network

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Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, as found in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, encourages us to "read...mark... learn...and inwardly digest" holy Scripture. The purpose of these four admonitions, according to the Collect, is to empower the reader to embrace and emulate Christ's teaching. Reading and reflecting upon Holy Writ, with an honest and open heart, helps us to do this. These simple meditations seek to honor the Collect's concern.

As in the past, with my other seasonal reflections, there is a process that I encourage you to follow. First, and foremost, read and reflect upon the Lesson of the day. Do not rush the Reading. Do not try to interpret the Reading. Sit before the Reading and let it speak to you. Instead of interpreting it, *let the text interpret you*.

As well, read and reflect upon the brief commentary that I have written. Engage with what I have suggested by asking questions. Is this how you read the text? Do you interpret this biblical passage in the same way? What are the readings, found in both the biblical text and my commentary, communicating to you? What is God asking you to do, based upon the Scripture provided?

Finally, and importantly, pray the prayer. The prayer, **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus**, is written in red and was originally composed as a hymn by Charles Wesley. Although I reference the same prayer each day, if done with devotion it will work its way into our hearts.

May the Christ-Child, Son of God and Son of Mary, incarnate himself ever more richly in our hearts and our lives.

1 **SUNDAY: Mark 13: 24 – 37**

Welsh artist, David Jones, has said that it is hard to see God at the end of civilization. Maybe, given our current "glocal" conditions, we are having difficulty seeing God as well. This world is not as it should be, not as God intended, not as we would want, and we may be feeling exceptionally vulnerable. St. Mark understood life's circumstances, and our feelings, providing us with some clear-sighted answers: "The Son of man is coming," Christ is "near" (RSV). Sometimes hardship helps cleanse our vision. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus**.

2 **MONDAY: John 5: 24 – 27**

The word of God resounds in beauty and brokenness, cosmos and chaos, questions, conundrums and quite a few answers. Jesus Christ is the Living Word: Hear! The Bible is the written word: Hear! The Homily, faithfully communicated, is the spoken word: Heed! These varied words, to be heard and heeded, grace us with promises and with possibilities as we live in this broken and imperfect world. As we read our Lesson for today, the word "hear" has been emphasized. And, importantly, it is linked to an expectation to "believe." Are we listening enough to "hear," "believe," and heed God? **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus**.

3 **TUESDAY: John 6: 57 – 63**

There are words and experiences that are hard to hear and integrate. It is likely that we can identify quite a few of them, and without much of a challenge. Headache, hardship and heart break are part of life. Although we may not always find reasons behind life's conundrums and contradictions, a faith-filled relationship with Jesus Christ can and does help. Fully participating in the life of Christ, and following him, quiets many questions. We need not "take offense" at a great many things because, when prayerfully processed, life-circumstances can help us "see the Son of Man" more clearly. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus**.

4 **WEDNESDAY: Mark 10: 13 – 16**

Kingdom hearts beat with hope, innocence, welcome and receptivity. These Kingdom qualities are often difficult to attain and maintain, however. As we age, but not necessarily mature, life can begin to harden us. We toughen-up, tighten-up, and can easily become jaded. With time, if we are not careful and prayerful, we become compromised in our compassion. What can be done to avoid this hardening of our spiritual capacities? At least part of an answer is grasped in the words “took” and “blessed,” as found in our Reading. These are familiar words, sacred words, sacramental words, Eucharistic words. Jesus has taken us up and blessed us as bread for the world. He has, so to speak, sacramentalized the secular. The People of God are the House of Bread (=Bethlehem) for the hungry world. This should provide hope for us and help for others. We, too, can expect and experience the epiclesis ---- the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us in order to transfigure and transform. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

5 **THURSDAY: Luke 12: 35 – 37; 42 – 44**

Noting the marriage-feast referenced in our Lesson, union with God requires work. And, more often than not, waiting is the work that is required. The nation of Israel waited for at least four hundred years before their exodus from Egypt. There was, as well, about four hundred years between the last word of the Old Testament and the first word of the New Testament. Within the context of the Christmas season, Israel waited for a word from God, the fulfillment of God’s promise to provide redemption and release. We also wait, albeit for our Lord’s “Second Coming.” But true waiting is never passive. Our “loins” must be girded and our “lamps” must be prepared. We must be ready to move by cultivating stillness and silence. The Master is coming. Are we waiting with welcome, and ready to serve? **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

6 **FRIDAY: Matthew 9: 27 – 31**

We are all blind, and in need of the mercy and the word of God. Faith in Jesus Christ opens our eyes and sets us upon the right path. Faith empowers God, so to speak, to enlighten us --- giving us sound spiritual sight. But faith, contrary to some, is not enough. Faith must be framed and formed by obedience. The two blind men failed in this regard. Consequently, while given physical vision, they remained in spiritual darkness. Instead of hearing and heeding what Jesus said, they did what they wanted to do and remained blind. And, oddly, what they did seemed entirely reasonable.....except that this was not what Jesus told them to do. Obedience provides ocular objectivity, helping us to truly see and see truly. True sight leads to right action. Seeing properly helps us to respond obediently. Every action of God upon our lives that does not result in holiness renders us blind. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

7 **SATURDAY: Matthew 9: 35 – 10: 1**

Christians have a calling. In fact, we have a number of callings. We are called to Christ. We are called to community. We are called to holiness. We are called to be Christian. We are called to share our faith by words and deeds. We are called to repent, believe, and serve. And these, likely, represent only the barest of beginnings. Our Lesson for today outlines Christ’s threefold calling to preach, teach and heal. That is, Jesus came to speak and *show* the good news of God’s redemption. As followers of Jesus, as disciples, we too are called and challenged and commanded to share the gospel by our words and our deeds. We have been granted authority to speak and to *show* Christ’s good word. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

8 **SUNDAY: Mark 1: 1 – 8**

Preparation is the path to success. To be prepared suggests that we have a plan, a purpose, and the power to accomplish our goal --- at least ideally. Our path is often, if not always, guided, governed and guarded by this goal. Our path to Christmas takes us through the waters of Baptism for the purpose of being released from sin and receiving the revelation of Jesus Christ. Repentance, which is turning from our sin, empowers the revelation. If we do not have our “head, heart and hands” washed by repentance, we will not be prepared to receive the revelation of Jesus as the Christ. Let us therefore renew our vows, or the vows that others have taken on our behalf, in order to “see him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly” (Richard of Chichester). **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

9 **MONDAY: Luke 5: 17 – 26**

Sin paralyzes, rendering us unable to effectively respond to God and other human beings as we should. Whether it is an absence of good, a presence of evil, or a measure of both, sin restricts the freedom that God intends for us. It is, so to speak, crippling. Although we may not always subjectively feel this way, sin’s crippling impact is an objective fact. Felt or not, believed or not, sin entangles and erodes every human capacity. However, and thankfully, God has provided a solution: “Behold:” We have Christ. “Behold:” We have his teaching and example. “Behold:” We have others, the Church, who can come to our aid. Christ, through his Church, speaks words of liberation. Are we sharing this good news of liberty with others? Are we living liberated lives? **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

10 **TUESDAY: Matthew 18: 12 – 14**

From a strict economic perspective, the Reading for today is utterly ridiculous. No shepherd in her or his right mind would “leave the ninety-nine” sheep in the wilderness and go and look for “one.” Such a pursuit could mean ruin. Instead of losing “one,” a great many more could be compromised. But this is not the point, and God does not think or behave in this manner. He is not a Divine bean counter, playing some crude game of heavenly abacus with us. God does not reduce the person to an economic equation. In the economy of God, from God’s perspective, the worth is in the person and not in the payoff. Jesus Christ, the “Great Shepherd,” left the safety and security of Heaven in order to search for the least, the lost and the little. The “Great Shepherd” searches for “one:” You. Me. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

11 **WEDNESDAY: Matthew 11: 28 – 30**

The Charles Wesley Hymn, “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” faithfully celebrates the sentiment of our Scripture Lesson, the deepest hunger of the human heart and the Messianic anticipation of God’s Chosen People. We are all, at one time or another, weary, waiting, and needing rest. The essential root of our weariness, however, is often overlooked. Although circumstances can and do wear us down, sin produces a soul-fatigue that can only be addressed by resting in Christ and his cause. Sin separates from all that is life-enhancing. It weights us. It burdens and wearies us. The answer to our soul-fatigue is having Christ’s priorities --- not our own, or those which other people or outdated social conventions place upon us. We must *come* to Christ. We must *take* Christ’s concerns upon us. We must be willing to *learn*. *We must be willing to truly live*. Do you think this emphasis upon sin is a bit out-of-place at Christmas? If we do, remember what the gospel tells us: The name of Jesus means to be saved...from sin (Matthew 1: 21). **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

12 THURSDAY: Matthew 11: 7 – 15

Hearing can be hard, most especially when a new way of hearing is needed. But learning to listen and to hear differently can yield rich rewards. After years in city and suburban settings, I moved to rural northwestern Massachusetts. The date was 20 July, 1969, the day of the first lunar landing. And, like the astronauts, my experience was entirely “other-worldly.” Everything was different, including how I saw and heard the world. When I went to bed, and all of the lights were off, pitch-darkness and utter-silence reigned. Absolutely nothing could be seen or heard.....at least until my ears and eyes entirely adjusted. Then, and only then, did I begin to see and hear differently.

The transition from the prophetic “violence” of John the Baptist to the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ was a dynamic shift. In order to understand, a new way of seeing, hearing and BEING was required. A shift in being, prompted by God’s revelation, empowers deeper seeing and hearing.

Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.

13 FRIDAY: Matthew 11: 16 – 19

Being and living “in Christ” is “wisdom.” They radically reorient us, empowering clarity of sight, sound and action. Our Lesson for today, literally following yesterday’s text, emphasizes an important truth: *Being, not just doing, defines us.* And, importantly, our being and our doing must not be guided or governed by social norms or cultural expectations. Christ and Christianity are radically countercultural. They are not status quo. They are not “as usual” or “as expected.” Both John and Jesus were sent by God, and society entirely misunderstood them. Society made determinations based upon shallow appearances and perceptions, not upon God’s reality. The incarnation of Jesus Christ – when God became a human being – call us to abandon childish evaluations and embrace maturity of “head, heart and hands.” It calls us to see and speak rightly. It calls us to *know* and *show* what it means to be baptized “in Christ.” Christ must define us, and all that we are, not culture. And, to be sure, as with John and Jesus, we will be misunderstood.

Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.

14 SATURDAY: Matthew 17: 9 – 13

Without reading the entire context of our Lesson, we could not appreciate the magnitude of what Jesus is saying. He is telling his three favored disciples not to share their experience of Christ with others. Oddly, as only Peter, James and John had witnessed the Transfiguration, this command appears to have included not telling the other nine disciples. They were not to say a word “until.” This word, “until,” highlights at least one important priority: Every spiritual experience or encounter may not be meant to be shared. There are some things we should not communicate, but keep to ourselves. Contrary to our experience-express culture, a robust spirituality requires the cultivation of temperance, moderation, silence, stillness. These restraints empower the experience to germinate and flower properly. Transfiguring encounters with God will often need to be nurtured in solitude, silence and in our everyday hum-drum lives “until...” **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

15 SUNDAY: John 1: 6 – 8, 19 – 28

In this age of the broken image, when the human person is almost entirely lost, vocation and profession are also horribly compromised. Identity and purpose are frequently disconnected, and, as such, direction and meaning are often limited or lost. Media, particularly “social media” (which often communicates and supports a distinctly anti-social orientation), testify to the fact that we have become faceless and formless functionaries in a meaningless world. The “selfie,” in

all of its self-promoting applications, simply means that people feel they must SCREAM in order to be seen and heard. John the Baptist did not have this problem. He understood his identity and his purpose because GOD HAD SPOKEN. His life was centered upon and within God, and this set him upon an understanding of himself that allowed him to freely and fully acknowledge what he was “not.” He was *not* God. He was *not* the Messiah. He was *not* the prophet. He was, quite humbly and honestly, an obedient voice. He did not need to be more or less than who he was, or do more or less than what he was called to do. Similarly, Christian identity and purpose must be centered in the Person, purpose and power of God. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

16 **MONDAY: Matthew 1: 18 – 25**

God became a human being at a particular time and place, and to a particular set of parents. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, is rooted in real history. And this real man in real history is precisely the point. The Incarnation, when God becomes a man, occurred (in some ways) in a very mundane way ---- much like billions of other births. Except, of course, Joseph did not have sex with Mary, Joseph was not the biological father, and the conception of Jesus was not in any way achieved through human initiative. God chose. God willed. God acted. God, by the Holy Spirit, “came upon” the Virgin in a manner similar to when the Spirit came upon the chaos of the primal waters in *Genesis*. That is, in other words, it was a miraculous conception in a kind-of, sort-of, mundane way in a world that is pregnant with the presence of God. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

17 **TUESDAY: Luke 1: 5 – 25**

We often overlook the obvious. How frequently have we searched...searched...searched for something, and found that what we were looking for was standing right before us? How often have we “wept and fasted” and “wept and prayed” (T. S. Eliot) for God’s intervention, but failed to recognize God’s answer when it arrived? This was the experience of Zechariah, and it is all-too-often our own. But this appearance was unusual, miraculous, and standing and speaking right before Zechariah. And, importantly, the appearance of the angel was a direct answer to prayer - --- God’s solution to his search. The priest had prayed, God had powerfully answered, and all that he could ask was “how?” All he could communicate was doubt, and this in the Temple with an angel standing and speaking before him! Maybe, recognizing that God *is* God, we should avoid asking “how?” questions and start asking “when?” questions. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

18 **WEDNESDAY: Luke 1: 26 – 38**

It is noteworthy that Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, the mother of God in the flesh, asked the same question as Zechariah: “How?” Nevertheless, his question was rejected and her question was accepted. One met with disfavor and the other met with favor. Why? Although both Zechariah and Mary were approved by God, Zechariah’s inquiry issued from doubt, and Mary’s was grounded in faith. It was almost the same question, but with different starting-points. The implication of this contrast is important: God welcomes every inquiry, just as long as we keep God as God in the equation. There may be times when our faith is tested. There may be times when we waiver. There may, indeed, be times when we pray “Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.” All of this is fine, if not good. God became a human being and knows what it means to share the struggle of our humanity ---- although he did so without sin. At times we may pray “how,” as did Mary, *but as an act of faith* whereby the impossibilities of humanity become the possibilities of God. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

19 THURSDAY: John 20: 24 – 29

Thomas Jefferson, a “Founding Father” of this nation, was a Deist who did not believe in miracles. His *Jefferson Bible*, a prime example of Clip-and-Paste Theology, presents Jesus as a noble teacher who communicated nothing more than sound moral principles. The *Jefferson Bible* removed all of the miracles from the biblical narratives and, as such, sought to reframe Jesus as a great moral teacher. Jesus was simply a good man with good ideas. The Incarnation (God becoming Man), Resurrection, Ascension and Second Coming were all summarily rejected because they were not “Scientific” and were, as such, “unreasonable.” Thomas Jefferson and Thomas the Twin, from our Lesson, had a lot in common: Doubt. But with “Doubting Thomas,” as there might have been with our floundering founding father, there was a difference. Jesus Christ invited his disciple to probe his wounds. Jesus invited his disciple to insert his fingers and hand into the openings of his crucifixion and, within our context, his resurrection. Thomas the Twin took up Christ’s invitation and Thomas Jefferson did not. Thomas the Twin came to believe and Thomas Jefferson did not. I wonder if our own doubts, my own doubts, are not rooted in an unwillingness to probe more deeply into our own woundedness and the woundedness of God. Sometimes our lack of faith can be rooted in an unwillingness to probe life, ourselves and God more honestly. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

20 FRIDAY: Luke 1: 46 – 56

God made much of Mary, and Mary magnified God. God was manifested in Mary’s womb, and Mary magnified God with her words. Womb and words were both employed and empowered for the glory of God. What was the cause of Mary’s celebration? Why the rejoicing? According to the Lesson of the day, there are a number of reasons. Among these are that God speaks and God acts --- and does so in accordance with his merciful holiness. God speaks and keeps His word. God acts, remembering His people and His promises. God is the God of full and faithful action, being true to His Person and His people. Who God is, what God says and how God acts are worthy of rejoicing. God magnified Mary and, to a certain degree and in a certain set of ways, God magnifies us. How can we, in loving response like Mary, make ourselves more available to God in order to accomplish God’s purposes? **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

21 SATURDAY: Luke 1: 57 – 66

God is God, and God acts as He sees fit. God chooses and uses according to the priorities, principles and practices He has set. Often these priorities and practices conflict with our own human agendas. God’s ways contrast with human will. Our Lesson for today capitalizes upon how God’s position overthrows human tradition. Elizabeth’s friends and family, while celebrating God’s goodness, had pronounced ideas about the naming of the child that had just been born. They insisted that tradition asserted a familiar name. Elizabeth and Zechariah, who were far more aware of the will of God, had an entirely different idea. After friends and family had dismissed Elizabeth’s suggestion, and upon asking Zechariah, they were quite surprised to read that Zechariah and Elizabeth were agreed: The child was to be named John. And, upon Zechariah’s obedient affirmation, Zechariah’s lips were again opened in joyous proclamation of God’s mercy. Speaking God’s word, a word often not in keeping with the status quo, will also loosen our tongues to speak rightly and celebrate joyfully. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

22 **SUNDAY: Luke 1: 26 – 38**

God holds, and has, time. Our Lesson states that it was in “the sixth month” that Gabriel was sent to Mary. In fact, within the entire context of God’s timing, it was about four hundred years between the last word of the Old Testament and the first word of the New Testament ---- about the same amount of time that Israel was in Egypt. This issue of time, and timing, is important and challenging. The world in which we live, and especially the industrialized world, are exceptionally “now” focused. Our undisciplined lives tend towards immediacy and instant gratification. Similarly, Satan supports swift satisfaction. God, however, cultivates an “acceptable time.” There is, according to Solomon, a “time and place for everything.” Proper waiting on God’s season prepares our hearts and lives to receive and conceive what God wants.....and when God wants what He wants. **Come Thou, long-expected Jesus.**

23 **MONDAY: Luke 2: 1 – 7**

All of our Lessons seem to converge upon this precise place, point, purpose and person: The incarnation of God in Christ at Bethlehem. As with life itself, which often appears to be random, some of our Readings had no apparent relationship to the subject at hand, the subject of Christmas and the object of Jesus Christ. Some of our Readings, may, indeed, have seemed entirely off topic. In God’s economy, however, they are not misplaced and misguided ---- even if the Church did arrange, and rearrange, them for liturgical purposes. These biblical words, all of them, have purpose and power. They are pregnant with motive and meaning just as Mary and Joseph slouched toward Bethlehem in obedience. They are pregnant with possibility, just like Mary and Joseph traveled (to be taxed) seemingly under the excruciating weight of temporal human powers. And here, in their everyday lives and on their extraordinary journey, Christ was born. And here too, on our own unusual pilgrimage through life, Christ will be born and reborn in our own lives. Merry Christmas! **WELCOME, Thou long expected Jesus!**

24 **BOXING DAY**

In Canada, and possibly elsewhere, the day after Christmas is called “Boxing Day.” As might be imagined, the holiday has a particular purpose: To return unwanted gifts. I am quite sure that every one of us have wanted to return an unwanted gift, as I know that I have.

The gift of God, in and through Jesus Christ, begs questions and responses. What will we do with the gifts and graces and responsibilities of Baptism, salvation, sanctification and Eucharist? What will we do with Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit? What will we do with the Holy Spirit and the gift of the Church? What will we do with the Church and the gifts of Scripture and Creeds and Articles of Religion? Will we believe, repent and receive? And, if received, what place will we give to God – and each other – in our practical day-to-day lives? Will we allow Christ to be conceived, born, nurtured and shared within and among us? Or, as a sad possibility, will we simply pack all of what Christ offers away and, maybe, revisit him next year? God gave His all for our nothing. Will we give our nothing for God’s all? **Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!**

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