



# *Advent Devotional*

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## SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Cathy Brall, Director of Field Education, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

### SCRIPTURE

#### 2 Peter 3:1-10

1 This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you 2 that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles. 3 First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" 5 They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, 6 through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless. 8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

### DEVOTIONAL

"The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness . . . ." For most of my life the adjective "slow" was not one I wanted applied to me. "Slow" was a synonym for being stupid, unproductive, or late as in "missing the boat" on something important. I wanted to be (or at least perceived to be) smart, efficient, up-to-date, and aware of whatever was important to be, know, or do. This passage tells us God risks appearing to be "slow" about Jesus' promise to return soon because God wants to give us extra time to get ready and be prepared. Here God's slowness is a good thing, a reflection of God's patience, mercy, and grace toward us because, in the final judgment, God doesn't want anyone to be without a gift under the tree of eternal life. With multiple messages and insatiable images, the secular world issues increasing demands upon us in the countdown to Christmas. Might we resist the pressure to appear smart, efficient, and up-to-date with the latest and greatest gifts, garb, and galas and opt instead to reflect God's slowness toward us and others by embracing the gift of the Advent season?

## PRAYER

God of a thousand years and the blink of a millisecond, grant me the willingness to cast aside the demands of this world, now in the days of these weeks before Christmas, that my heart may be humbled to receive more fully the gift of the Christ-child and my life enlarged to await more hopefully the return of my Savior and Judge. Amen.

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016

*Written by KJ Norris '14*

### SCRIPTURE

#### Psalms 122

- 1 I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"
- 2 Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
- 3 Jerusalem — built as a city  
that is bound firmly together.
- 4 To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
- 5 For there the thrones for judgment were set up,  
the thrones of the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
"May they prosper who love you.
- 7 Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers."
- 8 For the sake of my relatives and friends  
I will say, "Peace be within you."
- 9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,  
I will seek your good.

### DEVOTIONAL

Images flood our minds of the sorrows of this world: tent cities hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees; children so undernourished that eight-month-olds are mistaken for newborns; young black sons found dead in the streets; a political process so deceptive that a "Pinocchio Scale" is devised to see who tells the biggest lies. Where is peace? Where is true shalom—peace that is not just absence from violence but holistic rest—encompassing internal and external peace with God and neighbor and earth and self?

Advent, the season of waiting for Christ to come, is a time to remember how very good it is to go to the house of the Lord. We go to the house of the Lord not to forget the troubles of the world, not to hide our eyes from the suffering, but to acknowledge them. For we remember that God does not stand far off, does not ignore suffering and sin, but God

enters in. God took on human flesh, felt hunger and thirst and pain. Our Lord Jesus Christ defeated sin and death. So we await Christ's coming again when True Shalom will reign. We do not hide from sorrow, but we confess our sins, what we have done and what we have left undone, our individual sins and our collective sins. And we pray for peace while believing in the one who was and is and is to come, our Prince of Peace.

## PRAYER

Almighty God, it is truly good to spend time in your house praising your name. We give you thanks that you do not stand far off, but that you enter into our suffering. Teach us to be advocates for peace in this restless world, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2016

*Written by Dr. Michelle Keane Domeisen '12/'16, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Board Member*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 33

- 1 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous.  
Praise befits the upright.
- 2 Praise the LORD with the lyre;  
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.
- 3 Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- 4 For the word of the LORD is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- 5 He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
- 6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
- 7 He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;  
he put the deeps in storehouses.
- 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
- 9 For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.
- 10 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
- 12 Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.
- 13 The LORD looks down from heaven;  
he sees all humankind.
- 14 From where he sits enthroned he watches  
all the inhabitants of the earth —
- 15 he who fashions the hearts of them all,  
and observes all their deeds.

- 16 A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
- 17 The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.
- 18 Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
- 19 to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine.
- 20 Our soul waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and shield.
- 21 Our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.
- 22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.

## DEVOTIONAL

Yes, our lives are busy, and during this holiday season they seem to reel even more out of control. God's power and dominion loom so much larger in our lives than any chore we have to do at Christmas. During this season of anticipation, we take time to stand in awe of God as we wait in joyful hope for the Incarnation. God's about to do a new thing this season, and we must stand in attention.

The Psalmist points to God's omnipotence while also saying that His word is perfect. He speaks and it happens. Knowing this, our souls wait for Him because we need Him, we trust Him, we can't live without Him. Without His word and love, we have no hope. We immerse ourselves in the expectation of His inbreaking because the life-giving breath of God is about to be birthed in us. And that is the best gift we could receive this Christmas.

## PRAYER

Precious Lord, it is with great humility that we turn our attention from the demands of this season to focus on you. We need you, we trust you, we hope in you. Let your steadfast love be upon us. It is in your most holy name that we pray these words. You, the Alpha and the Omega, from ages unto ages.

## WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Ron Cole-Turner, H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 2:1-4

- 1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

- 2 In days to come  
the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.
- 3 Many peoples shall come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
- 4 He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

## DEVOTIONAL

Deafened as we are by all the noise that clamors for our attention, sometimes we wish that One Voice would rise above the rest as the highest mountain towers over foothills, that everyone else would just be silent, and that the whole world would hear the message of peace echoing from the mouth of God. We know that is not likely to happen soon.

Disheartened as we are by violence so sickening that it makes us want to shut our eyes, sometimes we wish that One Judge would right our wrongs and bring such peace that weapons are refashioned as farm tools. Not much chance of that, either.

And yet we hope. Despite the evidence, the long wait, the rage, or the bombs. We hope because above it all we hear a voice, not a booming voice from the highest mountain, but in the cry of a child in the night. For thus it is that Peace is born.

## PRAYER

Come, Holy Savior, Jesus Christ, God with us. How we need you! If our night is dark, shine all the more with the radiance of your light. Amen.

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. John Welch '02, Vice President for Student Services and Community Engagement and Dean of Students, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 2:5-22

- 5 O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the LORD!
- 6 For you have forsaken the ways of your people,  
O house of Jacob.  
Indeed they are full of diviners from the east  
and of soothsayers like the Philistines,  
and they clasp hands with foreigners.
- 7 Their land is filled with silver and gold,  
and there is no end to their treasures;  
their land is filled with horses,  
and there is no end to their chariots.
- 8 Their land is filled with idols;  
they bow down to the work of their hands,  
to what their own fingers have made.
- 9 And so people are humbled,  
and everyone is brought low —  
do not forgive them!
- 10 Enter into the rock,  
and hide in the dust  
from the terror of the LORD,  
and from the glory of his majesty.
- 11 The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low,  
and the pride of everyone shall be humbled;  
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.
- 12 For the LORD of hosts has a day  
against all that is proud and lofty,  
against all that is lifted up and high;
- 13 against all the cedars of Lebanon,  
lofty and lifted up;  
and against all the oaks of Bashan;
- 14 against all the high mountains,  
and against all the lofty hills;
- 15 against every high tower,  
and against every fortified wall;
- 16 against all the ships of Tarshish,  
and against all the beautiful craft.
- 17 The haughtiness of people shall be humbled,  
and the pride of everyone shall be brought low;  
and the LORD alone will be exalted on that day.
- 18 The idols shall utterly pass away.
- 19 Enter the caves of the rocks  
and the holes of the ground,  
from the terror of the LORD,  
and from the glory of his majesty,  
when he rises to terrify the earth.
- 20 On that day people will throw away  
to the moles and to the bats  
their idols of silver and their idols of gold,  
which they made for themselves to worship,

21 to enter the caverns of the rocks  
and the clefts in the crags,  
from the terror of the LORD,  
and from the glory of his majesty,  
when he rises to terrify the earth.  
22 Turn away from mortals,  
who have only breath in their nostrils,  
for of what account are they?

## DEVOTIONAL

“You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years  
And get pats on the back as you pass  
But your final reward will be heartache and tears  
If you’ve cheated the man in the glass.”

These words are an excerpt from Peter Wimbrow’s 1934 poem “The Man in the Glass.” It’s by God’s mercy that blind judgment is not dispensed, for God reveals the wrongs upon which judgment is warranted. Clearly, the ostentatious, self-indulging behavior of Judah provoked God, for this behavior evidenced the distortion of the image in which humankind was created. If we overlaid on our nation these allegations, leveled against Judah, what would be the result? We are also rich and prideful, yet the poor and marginalized are also victimized more than ever in our nation’s history. When we look in the mirror, we should see the bloodstained image of Christ who came into a world suffering from the sin fruit of injustice. His image should challenge our self-made images.

## PRAYER

Lord God, the well waters of poverty are rising around us while a select few sit on the perimeters with full water buckets in their hands, poised to add to the misery of others. Grant relief to the suffering and the hearts of those inflicting pain. Remind us all of why it was that You came. Amen.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Jerome F. D. Creach, Robert C. Holland  
Professor of Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalms 102

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
let my cry come to you.  
2 Do not hide your face from me  
in the day of my distress.  
Incline your ear to me;  
answer me speedily in the day when I call.  
3 For my days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a furnace.

4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass;  
I am too wasted to eat my bread.  
5 Because of my loud groaning  
my bones cling to my skin.  
6 I am like an owl of the wilderness,  
like a little owl of the waste places.  
7 I lie awake;  
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.  
8 All day long my enemies taunt me;  
those who deride me use my name for a curse.  
9 For I eat ashes like bread,  
and mingle tears with my drink,  
10 because of your indignation and anger;  
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.  
11 My days are like an evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.  
12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;  
your name endures to all generations.  
13 You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to favor it;  
the appointed time has come.  
14 For your servants hold its stones dear,  
and have pity on its dust.  
15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
and all the kings of the earth your glory.  
16 For the LORD will build up Zion;  
he will appear in his glory.  
17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and will not despise their prayer.  
18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come,  
so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:  
19 that he looked down from his holy height,  
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,  
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners,  
to set free those who were doomed to die;  
21 so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion,  
and his praise in Jerusalem,  
22 when peoples gather together,  
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.  
23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;  
he has shortened my days.  
24 “O my God,” I say, “do not take me away  
at the mid-point of my life,  
you whose years endure  
throughout all generations.”  
25 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.  
26 They will perish, but you endure;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;  
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.  
28 The children of your servants shall live secure;  
their offspring shall be established in your presence.



## DEVOTIONAL

Advent is a time to anticipate the coming of God's kingdom that we have seen already in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is a time for reflection, for turning to God in prayer, to confess our sins and to petition God for the deepest needs of our hearts.

Given this description of Advent, Psalm 102 is a marvelous passage for the season. The heading of the psalm identifies the kind of person who might pray its words: "a prayer for one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD." Perhaps being "afflicted" is the main requirement for celebrating Advent. "Afflicted" translates the Hebrew term *ani*, which may also be rendered "poor" or "needy." The Psalms suggest this description is a key self-identification of anyone who seeks God's salvation (Ps 40:17). But being "poor" or "needy" does not suggest we should be self-effacing or that we should deny the abilities God has given us. Rather, the expression of need is the first and necessary step in opening ourselves to God's grace. Psalm 102 has been identified traditionally as a penitential psalm. Read this way, the psalm is particularly appropriate: our greatest sign of need, that which causes our spirits to wither (v. 4), is our sinful turning away from the God who loves us.

## PRAYER

O God, You "are enthroned forever, and your name endures to all generations." But our days are "like an evening shadow." Therefore, we lay before you our every weakness—the brevity of our lives are but signs of our failure to live as your people. We trust ourselves to you, O God, and we pray that by your grace we might live securely in your presence, now and forevermore. Amen.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Derek Davenport '05, Director of Enrollment / Co-director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 4:2-6

2 On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. 3 Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, 4 once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. 5 Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a

flaming fire by night. Indeed over all the glory there will be a canopy. 6 It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

## DEVOTIONAL

Embedded within this passage we find cause for both hope and for fear. Isaiah speaks of burning and cleansing, but also of refuge and shelter. So often, we have difficulty embracing both of these aspects of our faith. We tend to focus either on God as judge or God as protector, yet here Isaiah unites both actions. It is only by "washing" Zion that God can make it safe.

As we celebrate Advent, the coming of Christ can be equally complex. Christ makes intense demands of his followers, yet also gives his life for them. He is both infant and lord, both God and human.

In the coming weeks, let us pay attention to the ways we portray the birth of Jesus and try to hold on to the complexity of a God who both cleanses and protects.

## PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for the wonder of this season. We thank you that you are our refuge and strength, and we ask you to help us follow you even when it is difficult. Amen.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Leanna Fuller, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalms 150

- 1 Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty firmament!
- 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
- 3 Praise him with trumpet sound;  
praise him with lute and harp!
- 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
praise him with strings and pipe!
- 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
- 6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!

## DEVOTIONAL

Advent marks the beginning of a new church year. It is a time of watching and waiting as we prepare to welcome Christ

into our hearts and lives anew. This perspective sounds very different from what we see each December in our culture, which encourages us to set our minds on what we want or hope to receive as gifts. Psalm 150 reminds us that during this Advent season (and all year round) we are called first to praise God for God's mighty deeds and according to God's surpassing greatness. Without God's grace and love, we would not exist. This realization should move us to praise God in every way we can think of, rather than focusing on what we want God to give us or do for us. This Advent, let's turn away from the constant "I want" messages of our consumer culture and, instead, lift our praises to God in a spirit of gratitude and awe. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

## PRAYER

Gracious God, we praise you for the gift of life, and for your grace and love. As we journey through this season of Advent, help us shift our focus from the many things that we want to the opportunities we have to praise you in our lives and in our communities. Amen.

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Anthony Rivera, Director of Admissions,  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

## DEVOTIONAL

Each Advent season, Christians around the world expectantly and excitedly look forward to the moment of celebrating the

arrival of the Christ—the one born to save God's people from their sins. The house is freshly painted, curtains are changed, new plates are on the table, and songs of glad tidings fill the air. Something exciting is in the air! Jesus is soon to be born! Today's reading holds a sense of excitement, but with a twist; it is a twist, not pointing to a past event but to one yet to happen. It is the arrival of the majestic Risen One; no longer a child, but Lord.

Be expectant, not just this Advent season, but also every day! Be "children of light and children of the day" in the midst of societal darkness. Your light, and life, will point to the One who will come . . . again!

## PRAYER

Blessed Trinity, as we expectantly and excitedly look forward to the moment of celebrating the Advent of the Christ child, may we be just as expectant and excited about the return of the Christ King. Help us to be children of light as we wait for his glorious appearance.

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016

*Written by Doris Calian, McMillan Society Member*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalms 146

- 1 Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
- 2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
- 4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.
- 5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
- 6 who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;
- 7 who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets the prisoners free;
- 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.
- 9 The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
- 10 The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD!

## DEVOTIONAL

As we prepare to greet and celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, let us approach each day with our eyes, ears, minds, and hearts open to finding glimpses of Christ in all our daily encounters. Let us start each day observing and appreciating each member of our household. Move on to those we meet regularly at our work and study places. Remember to observe those who serve us by bringing mail, tending our stores, repairing our roads. Keep in mind many whom we do not see who are suffering from infirmities, lost or fighting in desperate situations, some even oblivious to their surroundings. These souls are all children of God, and Christ looks to us to be one with them as we expectantly approach the gift of the Holy Babe in Bethlehem.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord, guide and lead us as we seek each day to recognize your presence in our midst. Help us to be sensitized to your love for all humanity and humbly accept all people of your creation as our sisters and brothers. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Erin Davenport LSW '05, Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 6:1-13

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" 9 And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;  
keep looking, but do not understand.'

10 Make the mind of this people dull,  
and stop their ears,  
and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and comprehend with their minds,  
and turn and be healed."  
11 Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:  
"Until cities lie waste  
without inhabitant,  
and houses without people,  
and the land is utterly desolate;  
12 until the LORD sends everyone far away,  
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.  
13 Even if a tenth part remain in it,  
it will be burned again,  
like a terebinth or an oak  
whose stump remains standing  
when it is felled."  
The holy seed is its stump.

## DEVOTIONAL

Isaiah tells us in verse 5 that he sees the King, the Lord of hosts, *before* he is clean. That is grace, isn't it? The revelation of the love of God for us is not dependent upon our cleanliness, our goodness, our worth; it is dependent upon the King, the Lord of hosts alone. We prepare in this time of Advent for the coming of the Christ child, but we cannot adequately prepare ourselves. We certainly try. And we certainly fail. God, through the love of Jesus Christ, is the only one who can prepare us. So in this time of preparation, take time to depend upon the God who gives us grace. Not because of what we do or who we are, but because it is God's power at work in our lives. Let us give thanks to our gracious and good God. Praise the Lord of hosts!

## PRAYER

Lord of hosts, we give thanks this day for your grace, which amazes, astounds and humbles us. We give thanks for your great and abundant power. We give thanks for your understanding that is beyond measure. Amen.

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2016

*Written by Dr. Scott Hagley, Assistant Professor of Missiology, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Luke 22:1-13

1 Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. 2 The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid



of the people. 3 Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; 4 he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. 5 They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. 6 So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present. 7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." 9 They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" 10 "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters 11 and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" 12 He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." 13 So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. 4 He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? 6 And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, 10 and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, 12 so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

## DEVOTIONAL

This past spring, I went to Home Depot to pick up some cedar boards for a garden box. It was only after digging up the front yard and assembling the raised bed that I recognized the risk involved with a front-yard garden. While the sun-saturated site was ideal from a gardening perspective, the very publicness of the garden made me uneasy, for gardening

is something over which we have marginal control. This summer we prepared the soil, we planted the seed, we watered the ground, but mostly we waited and watched in a very public sort of way as neighbors and strangers passed by with advice, judgment, and comments.

Our New Testament texts wrestle with this very Advent-like dance between preparation, anticipation, waiting, and the ways this dance can go wrong. As Passover nears, Judas takes drastic action to force change in the status quo and betrays Jesus. Paul cautions the Thessalonians to avoid jumpy and anxious conclusions regarding Christ's second coming. The fulfillment of God's promise, the coming of Christ, can be received, anticipated, and prepared for, but not produced. This Advent, may we learn to cultivate soil and prepare, may we learn to anticipate and wait. Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel.

## PRAYER

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,  
And be yourself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel! Amen.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2016

*Written by Sonya-Marie Morley, M.Div. Student, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 7:10-25

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. 17 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on your

ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah - the king of Assyria." 18 On that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. 19 And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures. 20 On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River - with the king of Assyria - the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well. 21 On that day one will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, 22 and will eat curds because of the abundance of milk that they give; for everyone that is left in the land shall eat curds and honey. 23 On that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns. 24 With bow and arrows one will go there, for all the land will be briers and thorns; 25 and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.

### **Psalm 148**

- 1 Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!
- 2 Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!
- 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.
- 6 He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
- 7 Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,
- 8 fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!
- 9 Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!
- 10 Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!
- 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!
- 12 Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!
- 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.
- 14 He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the Lord!

## **DEVOTIONAL**

The word "Immanuel" in Isaiah's prophecy explains why Advent is the season of solidarity. Just as we share time and space during Advent season by reading familiar narratives of Jesus' birth, singing carols and hymns about the baby Jesus, breaking bread together and buying each other gifts to commemorate the greatest of gifts to the world, so the Divine, being poured into human flesh, shared time and space with us by living "among us." Christ joined in radical solidarity with us: in service, supper, supplication, suffering, sin, sanctification, salvation and Spirit. It is this same sense that the psalmist uses as an invitation and imperative for all creation to join together to praise the One who created all and who relentlessly loves and seeks to reconcile all. Advent reminds us that Christ continues to join in solidarity with us, in each breath through the Holy Spirit, for God's good, merciful, just, gracious, and redemptive purposes.

## **PRAYER**

As we seek you, God, and wait expectantly to celebrate with great joy the anniversary of Christ's birth, help us to hear how we are being called during Advent and always to stand in solidarity with those experiencing injustice and oppression, knowing that you show your face in unexpected ways and places—like the finite and fragile face of a babe in a manger all those years ago. Amen.

## **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016**

*Written by the Rev. Dr. David Morse, Lecturer in United Methodist Studies, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## **SCRIPTURE**

### **2 Thessalonians 3:6-18**

6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. 9 This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. 14 Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard them

as enemies, but warn them as believers. 16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you. 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

## DEVOTIONAL

At the end of this enigmatic letter, the writer issues a straight forward series of commands that are summed up in the admonition of verse 13, “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” Regardless of what issues may or may not have prompted this letter, this word of direction is a timely word for us today, and it is especially relevant for our celebration of Advent. During this season we remember the one who came to be with us, and who, in the power of the Spirit, continues to come to be there for us.

As in every season of life, including Advent, we are not to be idle. We are not to grow lazy with the gift. We are not to become weary in doing what is right. We do what is right when, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we embody His gift to the world. Just as He was and is our hope, our peace, our joy, and our love, so also we are called to witness to that grace and truth by embodying it in the world. The one who has been sent by God into the world sends us to be His body in and for the world.

## PRAYER

Gracious God, help each of us to enter into this season as persons ready to be disciples of Jesus Christ, ready to take what we have been given and then to give it away to the world in lives of loving service. Let us seek justice, love mercy, and strive to do what is right through the power of the risen Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy '13, Associate Pastor for Mission Ministries at East Liberty Presbyterian Church / Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Board Member*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 24

- 1 The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; 2 for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.
- 3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
- 4 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

- 5 They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation.
- 6 Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.
- 8 Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.
- 9 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.
- 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

## DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 24 declares the sovereignty of God—Creator God, to whom all the world belongs, including humanity and God, the King of Glory, to whom all honor, majesty and worship belong. We can almost hear this song of praise and adoration being sung as worshipers entered into temple to worship Yahweh. We are told that only those who are “guiltless vessels” with clear, sincere, and pure souls, hearts, and minds—those who have not, nor will not, be carried away or influenced by evil or falsehoods—shall receive blessing and vindication from the God of salvation. It is almost paradoxical that only by the grace of God, through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, are we thus prepared to receive God's gifts. In this season, may we look ever to the “hill of the LORD,” from whence comes our help, our salvation, our redemptive holiness, and worship the only sovereign God, who is the King of Glory.

## PRAYER

Majestic and sovereign God, you alone are worthy of praise and honor. Lord, we confess that there are times when we enter into your presence distracted by the cares of life and do not give you the honor and presence of mind you are worthy of. As we contemplate the coming Christ child, direct our thoughts and create in us clean hands and pure hearts, that we might be found worthy of your love and the sacrifice of Jesus, for you are the King of glory, majesty and honor. Amen.

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2016

*Written by Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/13, Worship Coordinator, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 40

- 1 I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.

3 He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the LORD.

4 Happy are those who make  
the LORD their trust,  
who do not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after false gods.

5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;  
none can compare with you.  
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,  
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,  
but you have given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.

7 Then I said, "Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

8 I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation;  
see, I have not restrained my lips,  
as you know, O LORD.

10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,  
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;  
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your  
faithfulness  
from the great congregation.

11 Do not, O LORD, withhold  
your mercy from me;  
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness  
keep me safe forever.

12 For evils have encompassed me  
without number;  
my iniquities have overtaken me,  
until I cannot see;  
they are more than the hairs of my head,  
and my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;  
O LORD, make haste to help me.

14 Let all those be put to shame and confusion  
who seek to snatch away my life;  
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor  
who desire my hurt.

15 Let those be appalled because of their shame  
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16 But may all who seek you  
rejoice and be glad in you;  
may those who love your salvation  
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

17 As for me, I am poor and needy,  
but the Lord takes thought for me.  
You are my help and my deliverer;  
do not delay, O my God.

## DEVOTIONAL

"Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, never dies away." This text of a song comes to us from the Taizé community in France. Generally, songs end with a stable harmonic resolution, with the final chord offering a sense of arrival, of completion. But this particular song ends with a chord that feels unresolved. Even as the song ends and our voices fall silent, this unresolved chord hangs in the air, thus filling us with the sense that there is something more to come. Advent is the time when we are filled with hope and expectation for that something more.

The Psalmist is in the pit. He is crying out for God's mercy in much the same way that we cry out in the midst of racial injustice and natural disasters and refugee crises. But the Psalmist has been pulled out of the pit before and trusts that the God who has been faithful in the past will again bring deliverance. This is our Advent hope. Remembering that God's Kingdom came into our midst long ago, we cast our gaze forward in assurance of something more to come—the fullness of that Kingdom. And so, God has put a new song in our mouths—a song of trust and hope, a song sung even (or perhaps especially) in our darkest nights.

## PRAYER

Almighty and most merciful God, may your Spirit kindle a light in our darkness. Give us hope in times when your Kingdom seems too distant. Even as we long for something more than this broken world, put a new song in our mouths that we may proclaim your steadfast love and faithfulness. Amen.

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. L. Roger Owens, Associate Professor of Leadership and Ministry, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 85

1 LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.

3 You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.

4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us.

- 5 Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- 6 Will you not revive us again,  
so that your people may rejoice in you?
- 7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.
- 8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
- 9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
- 11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
- 12 The LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.

## DEVOTIONAL

Old Testament scholar James May points out a striking feature of Psalm 85: The psalm begins by testifying to God's already finished saving work; it sings of a fait accompli—God's salvation is a done deal. Then the situation changes: "Restore us again," the psalmist pleads. "Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?" God's salvation is a done deal, and yet the people are still awaiting it.

Christians reading this psalm in Advent can relate. We look back to God's accomplished salvation in Christ—it's a done deal. And yet we look around and see a world still broken—sin has not been vanquished, shalom does not yet prevail. In Advent, we look forward to the time when God will make clear and complete what is already finished in Christ, when "faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from on high"—in other words, when God's kingdom of peace will fill

## PRAYER

Loving God, who through your Son Jesus Christ brought your kingdom to earth, in this season of Advent give us patience as we wait for your often-hidden kingdom to burst forth from the ground and rain down from the sky, until righteousness and peace fill all things. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Don McKim '74, Academic and Reference Editor for Westminster John Knox Press / Pittsburgh Seminary Board Member*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 53

- 1 Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."  
They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts;  
there is no one who does good.
- 2 God looks down from heaven on humankind  
to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.
- 3 They have all fallen away, they are all alike perverse;  
there is no one who does good,  
no, not one.
- 4 Have they no knowledge, those evildoers,  
who eat up my people as they eat bread,  
and do not call upon God?
- 5 There they shall be in great terror,  
in terror such as has not been.  
For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly;  
they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.
- 6 O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!  
When God restores the fortunes of his people,  
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

## DEVOTIONAL

Psalm 53 (cf. Psalm 14) presents a dismal picture of humankind: "Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God'" and "there is no one who does good no, not one." Fools are "corrupt" and "perverse" (vv. 1, 3). They are "practical atheists," living without reckoning with God in any dimension of existence. God does not matter.

But "fools" run a risk—certain jeopardy of God's judgment. They will live "in terror such as has not been. For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly" and "they will be put to shame" (v. 5).

What can change? Help can come from only one source: God. The prayer is for "deliverance" ("salvation")—that "God restores the fortunes of his people" (v. 6).

This need is humankind's greatest—the need for "salvation," deliverance from our sin and from disregard for God. In Advent we anticipate God's deliverer to come: Jesus Christ! In him true help is ours!

## PRAYER

O God, we live as fools, denying your presence and power. We prefer our own ways, apart from you. O God, deliver us. Save us. Help us. As we anticipate our Savior Jesus Christ this Advent season, make our hearts full of the knowledge of you. May we rejoice! Amen.



## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2016

*Written by Dr. Martha Robbins, Joan Marshall Professor  
Emerita of Pastoral Care, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary /  
Director of Pneuma Institute*

### SCRIPTURE

#### Matthew 3:1-12

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3 This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

4 Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9 Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

### DEVOTIONAL

Christmas is only 10 days away. “Are you ready for it?” friends and relatives may ask? Some may have all the externals ready or “under control” for the holiday celebrations. Others may feel chronically unprepared and overwhelmed by the hectic pace of our lives triggered by the enormity of the issues we face, such as new presidential leadership, the speed of technological innovations, unprecedented moral questions, ecological disasters, and unrelenting acts of violence and threats of terror. Still others have a sense of dis-ease and are searching for a sense of purpose and meaning for their lives, much less the meaning of Christmas that appears as tinsel to them.

So how can we really hear the words of John the Baptist proclaiming that the reign of God has come near? Are we ready for it—for the coming of the One who “baptizes (us) with the Holy Spirit and fire” and thus effects the reign of God in our midst? How do we prepare to receive this ever

coming One within our hearts and in our midst? John is clear in his guidance: “Repent!” This word may evoke a sense of shame that automatically turns in on itself with some inner judgment, such as, “I’m not good enough.” The true sense of repentance, however, is born in relationship, in the faith-filled experience of being loved into being at every moment by God who “words” us forth in and through Christ, who became flesh to dwell with us, bear our sins unto death, and send us His very Spirit of Love. The Spirit, source of life, holiness, and wisdom, enlightens and kindles our hearts with love of God, human beings, and all creation—the world God so loved. Thus, whenever we are truly convicted by the Spirit that we have not loved God, others, and ourselves as we have been so loved, we are gifted to feel and express sincere regret or remorse about our offending action or omission. Genuine repentance leads to confession and acceptance of forgiveness, fills us with gratitude and peace, and brings us back to our true selves-in-Christ in relation to God, others, and creation.

### PRAYER

Most gracious and loving God, send forth your Holy Spirit to search, purify, consume, and make holy all that is in me (especially \_\_\_\_\_) that prevents me from perceiving and welcoming the Risen Christ among us, inviting us to co-labor with him in his mission of building the reign of God in our midst.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Melanie Kim Hamill ‘12, Campus Minister  
at Ringling College of Art and Design, New College of Florida,  
and University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee*

### SCRIPTURE

#### Psalms 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.

## DEVOTIONAL

*It's late. It's dark in my house with only the faint glow of my digital clock, which reads 2:40 a.m. It might as well say 7:00 a.m. because sleep eludes me. I can't get out of my head. My stomach is in knots. I'm so worried. I'm fraught. There is no way out. I feel so alone. I will be found out.*

Have you ever found yourself in over your head? Out of your depth? Sometimes, despite our best intentions we can find ourselves overcome with self-doubt and driven by self-preservation at any cost. This plight is especially the case when we have messed up and left the trustworthy, narrow path to find our own way. In turn, we are led to a place of deep anxiety, fear, and isolation. Taking up residence in this place of darkness is our undoing. The Psalmist knows this place—intimately. However, the Psalmist also knows that God is the only sure thing. God is relentless in God's pursuit of us. With pure love, grace, mercy, power, and strength, God rescues us, redeems us, and sustains us through God's own son. We have a way out and a way through in Christ. Christ is our assurance that we are in fact never alone and always welcome, even if we have gone rogue. As we wait, we hope. We hope because we are lavishly loved.

## PRAYER

We wait upon you, Christ our Lord  
for you come in love,  
you come in peace,  
and you come for us.  
Grant us courage oh long expected One,  
for you are the fulfillment of our hoping.  
In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer,  
Amen.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2018

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Steve Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Luke 3:1-9

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism

of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" 7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

## DEVOTIONAL

"I am going to write a word on the board," I sometimes tell my Bible students. "It is a short, common word, but you will be unable to pronounce it, or to tell me exactly what it means." I then take a piece of chalk and write, "R-E-A-D." Of course, whether "read" is pronounced "reed" or "red," and whether it is present or past tense, depends upon its context. Knowing that context matters, Luke pays careful attention to where and when and to whom John proclaimed the day of the Lord and grounds John's words in a particular time and place. So too, *our* ministry has a context. We also serve in a very particular time and place—*here* and not there, *now* and not then. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is no abstraction. It is real life for real people—like us.

## PRAYER

Holy Lord, we would prefer an abstract faith, lofty and spiritual. Remind us that, just as our incarnate Lord comes into our messy, fleshy world, so we are sent to actual people in actual places with actual needs. Help us, Abba, to keep it real! *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

*Written by Dr. Helen Blier, Director of Continuing Education*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 11:1-9

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- 2 The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

3 His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.  
 He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
 or decide by what his ears hear;  
 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
 he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
 and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
 and faithfulness the belt around his loins.  
 6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
 the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
 and a little child shall lead them.  
 7 The cow and the bear shall graze,  
 their young shall lie down together;  
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's  
 den.  
 9 They will not hurt or destroy  
 on all my holy mountain;  
 for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
 as the waters cover the sea.

## DEVOTIONAL

Oh, the peaceable kingdom—wolves and lambs, calves and lions—I always loved the harmony suggested by the image! And it lends itself to a great art project when you're doing children's church.

But look more closely—this isn't just a matter of enemies all just getting along or opponents crossing a theological divide. There's a big power differential reflected in these pairings; wolves eat lambs, not the other way around. Lions hunt calves. The peace that will be brought by the Lord is one in which those who are in positions of power and privilege no longer pose a threat to the weak and oppressed.

Indeed, the option of the Lord is for the lamb and the calf, the poor and the meek—the Lord, who will come as a shoot, a tender stem, an infant, opts for fragile life that is easily bruised and trodden. The God of mercy comes to us as one most in need of mercy and gentleness.

Who are the lambs among us today? The calves? Who needs the protection and care of those of us with some measure of power or privilege, whether it comes from what we have or who we are? Matthew 25 gives us a clue—those who are hungry, sick, lonely, poor, imprisoned. Children, elderly, refugees. Those on the margins. When we protect and cherish them, then, says Isaiah, “earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

## PRAYER

Eternal God, we know that you have always been faithful to us. We know that you will always be faithful to us. Your love is from everlasting to everlasting. You are the alpha and the omega. Help us to remember your faithfulness during this time of waiting. Help us to live into the hope and the joy of Mary and Elizabeth. Thanks be to God. Amen!

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2016

*Written by Fr. Eric McIntosh '12, Pastor of St. James Episcopal Church, Penn Hills, Pa.*

## SCRIPTURE

### John 5:30-47

30 “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. 31 “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. 33 You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. 39 “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. 40 Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 I do not accept glory from human beings. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

## DEVOTIONAL

I believe that sometimes we really get Jesus upset. Jesus comes with eternal life in his hands but often finds many of us rejecting his gift. Don't get me wrong—we want life . . . we just don't want Jesus. We look for life in our places of employment, in our degrees, in our spouses, our bank

accounts, and our possessions. When we find that these temporal things or people fail us, we look to upgrade. We find ourselves in a lifestyle of acquisition and in turn really miss out on truth and blessing because we look for the eternal in the temporal. We make Jesus even more frustrated when we say we are His but live as though He is not ours. Jesus told those who rejected him, that neither the word nor the love of God was in them. This Advent season as he comes, is he telling us the same?

## PRAYER

Jesus, as you come to us, help us to come to you for life, eternal life, the most wonderful gift possible. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Jim Durlleser '78/'80, Lecturer in Biblical Languages, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 94

- 1 O LORD, you God of vengeance,  
you God of vengeance, shine forth!
- 2 Rise up, O judge of the earth;  
give to the proud what they deserve!
- 3 O LORD, how long shall the wicked,  
how long shall the wicked exult?
- 4 They pour out their arrogant words;  
all the evildoers boast.
- 5 They crush your people, O LORD,  
and afflict your heritage.
- 6 They kill the widow and the stranger,  
they murder the orphan,
- 7 and they say, "The LORD does not see;  
the God of Jacob does not perceive."
- 8 Understand, O dumbest of the people;  
fools, when will you be wise?
- 9 He who planted the ear, does he not hear?  
He who formed the eye, does he not see?
- 10 He who disciplines the nations,  
he who teaches knowledge to humankind,  
does he not chastise?
- 11 The LORD knows our thoughts,  
that they are but an empty breath.
- 12 Happy are those whom you discipline, O LORD,  
and whom you teach out of your law,
- 13 giving them respite from days of trouble,  
until a pit is dug for the wicked.
- 14 For the LORD will not forsake his people;  
he will not abandon his heritage;
- 15 for justice will return to the righteous,  
and all the upright in heart will follow it.

- 16 Who rises up for me against the wicked?  
Who stands up for me against evildoers?
- 17 If the LORD had not been my help,  
my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.
- 18 When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"  
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.
- 19 When the cares of my heart are many,  
your consolations cheer my soul.
- 20 Can wicked rulers be allied with you,  
those who contrive mischief by statute?
- 21 They band together against the life of the righteous,  
and condemn the innocent to death.
- 22 But the LORD has become my stronghold,  
and my God the rock of my refuge.
- 23 He will repay them for their iniquity  
and wipe them out for their wickedness;  
the LORD our God will wipe them out.

## DEVOTIONAL

James Luther Mays begins his commentary on Psalm 94 by stating that the theme of the psalm can be found in the line from the hymn "This Is My Father's World" which affirms that, "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

There are, indeed, many times in life when "the wrong" seems so strong. There are times when we look around us and all we see are violence, injustice, suffering, loneliness, and hopelessness. It is at those times that we join the psalmist in praying that God will rid the world of all "the wrong" that we see around us and that God will bring renewal to our communities, transforming what seems to be a hopeless end into endless hope.

During this season of Advent, hold tightly to the affirmation that God is still in control—that "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

## PRAYER

Almighty God, we affirm that, though the wrong seems oft so strong, you are the ruler yet. We join with the psalmist of old in praying that you will rid our world, our communities, and our homes of all of the wrong that we see around us, this Advent season and throughout the year. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Edwin Chr. van Driel, Bicentennial Directors' Associate Professor of Theology, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 29:9-24

- 9 Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor,  
blind yourselves and be blind!  
Be drunk, but not from wine;  
stagger, but not from strong drink!
- 10 For the LORD has poured out upon you  
a spirit of deep sleep;  
he has closed your eyes, you prophets,  
and covered your heads, you seers.
- 11 The vision of all this has become for you like the words  
of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read,  
with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for  
it is sealed." 12 And if it is given to those who cannot read,  
saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read."
- 13 The Lord said:  
Because these people draw near with their mouths  
and honor me with their lips,  
while their hearts are far from me,  
and their worship of me is a human commandment  
learned by rote;
- 14 so I will again do  
amazing things with this people,  
shocking and amazing.  
The wisdom of their wise shall perish,  
and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.
- 15 Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the LORD,  
whose deeds are in the dark,  
and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"
- 16 You turn things upside down!  
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?  
Shall the thing made say of its maker,  
"He did not make me";  
or the thing formed say of the one who formed it,  
"He has no understanding"?
- 17 Shall not Lebanon in a very little while  
become a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest?
- 18 On that day the deaf shall hear  
the words of a scroll,  
and out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.
- 19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,  
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of  
Israel.
- 20 For the tyrant shall be no more,  
and the scoffer shall cease to be;  
all those alert to do evil shall be cut off —
- 21 those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit,  
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate,  
and without grounds deny justice to the one in the  
right.

22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham,  
concerning the house of Jacob:

No longer shall Jacob be ashamed,  
no longer shall his face grow pale.

23 For when he sees his children,  
the work of my hands, in his midst,  
they will sanctify my name;  
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,  
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 And those who err in spirit will come to understanding,  
and those who grumble will accept instruction.

## DEVOTIONAL

We are taught to experience life's events as a predictable chain of cause and effect. The stock market goes up and we rejoice, we lose an election and we feel depressed, we see empty pews and we feel deflated.

Today's readings offer a completely different take on history. Eyes are closed or opened, ears are covered or made to hear, the meek are lifted up and tyrants are no more—not by the inevitable forces of history, but by the surprising, contingent, sovereign acts of God.

That's what Advent wants to prepare us for. Babies are born out of virgins, salvation comes from crucifixion, and the resurrecting One breaks open the grave. "You turn things upside down!" says the prophet (v. 16) in an amazement that echoes through the ages (see Acts 17:6!).

So fear not, for nothing will be impossible with God (Lk 1:37).

## PRAYER

Lord our God,  
You who cast down and lift up, you who close and open  
according to your sovereign will,  
help us to rest safely  
in the assurance that only you  
are history's Lord,  
leading us to the glory and peace  
of your Kingdom.  
Amen.

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2016

*Written by Michelle Spomer, Donald G. Miller Librarian  
and Director of the Clifford E. Barbour Library, Pittsburgh  
Theological Seminary*



## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 62

- 1 For God alone my soul waits in silence;  
from him comes my salvation.
- 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.
- 3 How long will you assail a person,  
will you batter your victim, all of you,  
as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?
- 4 Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence.  
They take pleasure in falsehood;  
they bless with their mouths,  
but inwardly they curse.
- 5 For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from him.
- 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
- 7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
- 8 Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us.
- 9 Those of low estate are but a breath,  
those of high estate are a delusion;  
in the balances they go up;  
they are together lighter than a breath.
- 10 Put no confidence in extortion,  
and set no vain hopes on robbery;  
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.
- 11 Once God has spoken;  
twice have I heard this:  
that power belongs to God,  
12 and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.  
For you repay to all  
according to their work.

## DEVOTIONAL

It is both amazing and discouraging that some things just don't change when it comes to human nature. Slander? Lies? Extortion? Greed? All these vices existed hundreds and hundreds of years ago just as they exist today. While this note may sound a bit dire, be assured that there has always been another constant—God's presence in our lives.

Throughout Psalm 62, the descriptions of humanity's shortcomings are surrounded by affirmations of God's strength, shelter, and trustworthiness. The trick is to be deliberate about recognizing God's presence and what God wants to be for us in our day-to-day struggles.

Take refuge in God. Try carving out some time for your soul to "wait in silence." Create space so that you can "pour out your heart" before God. There are no better ways to anticipate and prepare for Christ's coming this Advent season.

## PRAYER

Lord, my soul waits in silence. You alone are my rock, my salvation, my fortress. My refuge is in you, and I trust in your power and steadfast love. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016

*Written by Dr. Tucker Ferda, Lecturer in New Testament,  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 16

- 1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
- 2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you."
- 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,  
in whom is all my delight.
- 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names upon my lips.
- 5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
I have a goodly heritage.
- 7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.
- 8 I keep the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
- 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also rests secure.
- 10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit.
- 11 You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

## DEVOTIONAL

There are several terms in this Psalm that also fill advertisements this time of year: "Delight," "gladness," "rejoicing," "joy," "pleasures." These ads call us to adopt these attitudes in the same way we would purchase products and thus are ultimately about our own gratification and enjoyment of the holiday season. The psalmist offers a different picture, and one with deepened significance in the light of the incarnation of Jesus Christ: "Delight," "gladness," "rejoicing," "joy," "pleasures" are due to God's character and God's nearness to us. We affirm, with the psalmist, that our hearts are "glad" and our souls "rejoice" because God is "always before" us and has come near to us in Christ. We are "secure" because of that gift, and "shall not be moved."

## PRAYER

Gracious God, enable us to sing “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” Be our delight, portion, and cup this day, as we wait for what only you can provide and have in fact provided. Let us sing this psalm with lives that delight to take refuge in you. Amen.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Dr. Kenneth J. Woo, Assistant Professor of Church History, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

## SCRIPTURE

### Luke 1:67-80

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. 78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” 80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.’

## DEVOTIONAL

We anticipate. We prepare. We dream. But what do we really expect? And when is the waiting worth it? Zechariah was accustomed to waiting. He waited for a son. Then he waited to get his voice back. And when he did, it was worth it. He who had expected so little of God now dares us to expect too much! God’s promise spans generations, overcomes resistance, endures forgetfulness, and—in Zechariah’s case and our experience—transforms doubts. This Christmas Eve, may Zechariah’s song deepen our anticipation, guide our preparations, inspire our dreams: Dawn has broken from on high! By the light of Emmanuel those who sat in darkness and walk in death’s shadow can serve God without fear in the way of peace. Whether in joy or in the sorrow of sin,

injustice, and despair, let us hope in God’s tender mercy in Christ and learn to expect nothing less.

## PRAYER

Gracious and merciful God, fill our hearts with the hope of Zechariah as we celebrate this eve of Christ’s arrival. Guide our feet into the way of peace, that we might walk without fear to reflect and extend the light of Emmanuel, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2016

*Written by the Rev. Michael Gehrling ’08, Pastor of Upper Room Church Community / Director of International Graduate and Faculty Ministry for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship*

## SCRIPTURE

### 1 John 4:7-16

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

## DEVOTIONAL

It’s Christmas, and I am exchanging gifts. Gifts express love. Receiving a gift can also change us. The gift may be as mundane as socks, changing the recipient’s wardrobe ever so slightly, or as profound as an engagement ring, changing the course of the recipient’s life forever.

In his letter, John tells of God’s two most profound gifts—Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. These gifts show God’s love. They have also changed every person who has ever received them. Just consider Mary, or the apostles, or any of the thousands who have opened these gifts.

It’s Christmas day, and I’m also grieving. This is the first Christmas I’m celebrating without my mother, who died this

year. In grieving, God has convicted me that God is not going to bring back the past, but God will give new gifts to me that are good. Put another way, God has something new in front of me, and it's going to be good.

This Christmas, be open to God's doing something new in your life. It may be unfamiliar, but it will certainly be good.

### **PRAYER**

God, what new gift are you giving to me today? Jesus, to what, or to whom, are you calling me? Holy Spirit, what new thing do you desire to do in me? Even if it changes me forever, I'll open your gift, because You are good.

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