



# An Advent of Giving

Readings and Reflections for the Advent  
Season 2019 based on the  
Revised Common Lectionary Daily  
Readings

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# An Advent of Giving

This devotional contains readings, reflections, and prayers for a portion of the Advent season. We ask you to read the Scripture, meditate on the message, pray the prayer — and add a non-perishable food item to a box or bag. Bring them with you to worship each Sunday. We will deliver them to the Food Basket.

If you are using this resource in some place and time that you cannot worship at Church of the Holy Cross, please bring your food gifts to a convenient hunger ministry.

Advent 2019

An ancient vision newly understood.  
A mother's vision of a righteous world.  
A clarion summons, so harshly declaimed.  
A child born to promise beyond hope.

Let Advent come in spirits filled with light.  
Let Advent come to fill the cupboards bare.  
Let Advent come to give the weary hope.  
Let Advent come with love and peace and joy.

## Monday, December 9

*Psalm 21:3, 7*

*For you meet [the king] with rich blessings;*

*you set a crown of fine gold on his head...*

*For the king trusts in the LORD,*

*and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.*

I think the last crown I wore was made out of cardboard. I'm pretty sure I wore it for a child's birthday party – my child's – at a fast food restaurant with a game court. As I recall, it fit badly and was pretty uncomfortable.

The author of Psalm 21 may have had a different experience of a crown; it's credited to King David, after all. I'm sure his crown fit properly, and that its edges were properly rounded so as not to dig into the royal forehead.

David's crown also weighed more than mine did. Gold is heavier than paper, and the king's responsibilities are greater than a pastor's. In his life he endured hardship and rejoiced in success. He struggled with enemies and received the support of friends.

Best of all, in this psalm he declared his trust in the greatest source of help: "the king trusts in the LORD." Whatever our role in life, whatever our situation in life, may we all trust in God.

**Prayer:**

In our suffering, be with us. In our success, be with us. We trust in you, O God. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Tuesday, December 10

*Isaiah 41:17*

*When the poor and needy seek water,  
and there is none,  
and their tongue is parched with thirst,  
I the LORD will answer them,  
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

According to a 2012 United Nations report, 780 million people (about 1 in 10) do not have access to “an improved water source,” by which they mean something that *should* be safe. As we have seen in such places as Flint, Michigan, not even improved water sources fulfill their aims. Here on Hawai’i Island, our neighbors in Kona struggled for months with service reductions due to equipment failures.

God promised the poor rivers and fountains (v. 18), which would meet the need of Isaiah’s day but not of ours. Those water sources suffer contamination from the widespread human activity that covers this entire planet. It is up to us to cleanse the water sources we have polluted and to deliver that water safely to every person.

Water, even more than food, is the bread of life.

**Prayer:**

Give to the poor rivers and fountains, O God. Give to them also the steady commitment of all their neighbors to bring them safe and clean water, the stuff of life. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Sunday, December 15

*Luke 3:46a-48*

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed...”*

That is certainly true. All generations have rejoiced in the blessedness of Mary. Further, we have rejoiced in the blessedness in which she took part, which she quite literally delivered.

Mary, as described in the Gospel of Luke, combines wonder at the unexpected acts of God with a personal force and spirit. She dared to ask questions of an angelic messenger when Gabriel’s words didn’t make sense to her. She took the initiative to visit her cousin Elizabeth on hearing that she, too, was expecting a child. She sang her turn-the-world-upside-down Magnificat in response to Elizabeth’s praise of her, Mary’s, faith.

Can we emulate the boldness of Mary to carry God’s blessing into our daily lives? Can we emulate the boldness of Mary to imagine a world in which the hungry eat their fill? Can we emulate the boldness of Mary and rejoice in the salvation of God?

**Prayer:**

Thank you for Mary, O God. Thank you for her faithfulness, for her boldness, and for her eagerness to bring about your reign of justice and peace. May she inspire us, one and all. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

up, and help me see your grace at work all through the world. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Saturday, December 14

*Luke 3:10-11*

*And the crowds asked [John the Baptist], "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."*

In my imagination, John the Baptist is the strident voice of the New Testament, the roughly-spoken judgmental spokesman for an angry God. But... his answer to the crowd's question, "What then should we do?" is well within our capacity, isn't it?

If you have two coats, give one to somebody who needs it.

If you have food, share.

That sound you hear is my head spinning.

It's so *simple*. It's so *easy*. Why do we make it sound so hard? Why do we make it sound so extreme?

To avoid doing it?

Prayer:

Give us the grace to hear you aright, O God. Give us the grace to hear your messengers aright. Give us the grace to understand your practical, possible, and pressing call. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Wednesday, December 11

*Matthew 12:33*

*[Jesus said,] "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit."*

Years ago, one of my great-uncles came to visit us at my father's house. Our yard contained several fruit trees: apple, pear, and cherry. My uncle reached for an apple and began to eat it without concern.

My father and I were horrified.

It had been years since we had taken any care for those trees. We could be certain that no toxic pesticides or herbicides contaminated that apple, since we never applied any, but what bugs, worms, or worse might have made their way into the fruit? As the old joke goes, there's only one thing worse than finding a worm in the apple, and that's finding half a worm!

My great-uncle didn't find either one, thank goodness. He ate the apple with every sign of deep enjoyment. The tree had apparently made itself good without any help from us.

Well done, tree.

Prayer:

Despite the uncertainties of our circumstances, O God, may we make good people of ourselves. Give us grace to share with those around us the fruits you grow in us. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Thursday, December 12

*Psalm 146:5-7*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,  
who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.*

What did the psalmist praise?

First, the creation of heaven, earth, sea, and “all that is in them.”

Second, the unchanging faithfulness of God.

Third, the promise of justice for those who do not receive justice from human beings.

Fourth, the delivery of food to those who do not receive food from human beings.

Doesn't it seem as if the last two ought to be *our* work?

Shouldn't justice and food be accessible to all humanity?

Isn't that something we can do, and not something we need to rely upon God for?

Yet over and over again, the oppressed and the hungry raise their prayers to God because their human neighbors will not respond to their need.

**Prayer:**

Bring justice. Bring food, O God. Bring also a transformation of human hearts, so that we no longer rely on you to do our work. Amen.

*Now pray with a gift of food.*

## Friday, December 13

*Psalm 146:7b-9*

*The Lord sets the prisoners free;  
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.  
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the Lord loves the righteous.  
The Lord watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

There are days when I'd like a box seat for some wicked-ruination.

Wouldn't it be great to see all those whose deeds I condemn, whose actions I deplore, whose ideas disgust me – wouldn't it be great to see them getting what they deserve? Getting some retributive justice? Getting some righteous anatomy-kicking?

I suppose it would, as long as I don't qualify for “the way of the wicked.” Since I'm not entirely sure about that, I'd probably better hold my enthusiasm for “what 'they' deserve.”

Instead, I'll cling to the positive commitments of our God, as did the Psalmist who gave far more words to them. God sets people free. God brings healing. God raises the burdened. God loves those who do right. God cares for the foreigners. God supports the most vulnerable people in the community.

Yes. That's what I'll buy tickets to see. The wicked can ruin themselves without my presence. I want to be there to see people lifted up.

**Prayer:**

Lift me up, O God, from the burdens that best me. Lift me