



*Advent
Reader*



INTRODUCTION

“Surprise is the wonder-food God gives to nourish our hearts with joy”, wrote Timothy Willard. Advent is all about joyous surprise. We are surprised that the God who is beyond our understanding decided to join us by wrapping himself in our skin. And we are surprised that he did it simply because he loves us beyond our wildest dreams.

When something that is “wonder-full” and seemingly too good to be true turns out to be actually true, we humans react by singing with joyous surprise. For centuries, we’ve gathered in villages, town squares, barns and churches to sing songs in celebration of the good news of Jesus’ birth. Born of joyous surprise, these Advent carols come straight from our hearts, and their music and words are Christendom’s best witness to weary souls.

When we sing these carols, we sing not only to God and to each other, but also to our own heart. Many of us began this year with hope, yet have come to Advent in tears – weary of life, weary of hurt, weary of fears. We long for healing, acceptance, love, and for all things to be put right. Advent encircles us with reminders that we live under the watchful care of God, whose hands clasp us as surely as those of a mother or father clasping a child’s hand.

We feel the comfort and joy in a carol that Christians have sung for 800 years: Good people all, this Christmas time, Consider well and bear in mind, What our good God for us has done, In sending his beloved son.

And we cheer our hearts with the good news of immense joy:
Hark how the bells, Sweet silver bells, All seem to say,
Throw cares away, Christmas is here, Bringing good cheer.

Advent refreshes with its joyous reminder that “the Kindness of God has come”. Our hearts cannot help but sing our thanks, joy and thrill of hope.

Sunday, December 3 - First Sunday of Advent

Why wait?

Romans 8:22-25

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Waiting is a period of learning. The longer we wait, the more we hear about him for whom we are waiting.

-- Henri Nouwen

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.
-- translated from Latin Vespers
used in the final days before
Christmas.

• Advent is all about waiting, anticipating, hoping. Do you think that slowing down and waiting are a waste of time? Why?

• What do you think Paul meant that God is enlarging your soul? What does it look like in your life?

• Take a few moments to write a one-sentence description of your daily life with God. Keep this sentence in a place in which you can find it periodically during Advent.

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

All around us we observe a pregnant creation...But it's not only around us, it's within us. The spirit of God is arousing us within... That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant woman. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

NOTES

Monday, December 4
The light that is too bright to see
1 Timothy 6:15-16

Reflections & Songs of the Church

If God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognize, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other.

-- Hans Urs von Balthasar

Good people all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind,
What our good God for us has done,
In sending his beloved son
With Mary holy we should pray,
To God with love this Christmas Day,
In Bethlehem upon that morn,
There was a blessed Messiah born.

-- Wexford carol from the 12th century

For Your Reflection

- When you think about God, what do you mean? Try to put it into words.
- Why is it that “human eyes can’t take him in?” Is our incapacity more than physical sight?
- If God is real but beyond analysis and description, how can we connect in any way with him?

Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message* :

{God’s} light is so bright no one can get close. He’s never been seen by human eyes – human eyes can’t take him in.

NOTES

Tuesday, December 5
God whispered his most intimate Word
John 1:1-5, 14-18

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

As if human existence isn't strange enough, God decided to join us in the muck. As if he hadn't already given us enough—in his Word as Scripture, through his guidance, by way of his prophets, and in his patient, repeated revelation—he gave us himself. He whispered to us the most intimate Word he could speak. He became man. -- Karen Edmisten

- Why do you think that God – after all he had done for his creatures – chose to cross the abyss and come down to our level?
- How is Jesus “the most intimate Word he could speak?”

Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He, Of the things that are, that have been, And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore! -- Of the Father's Love Begotten – a 16th century carol translated from a 4th century Latin poem

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

No one has ever seen God at any time.
It is the unique Son, who exists at the very heart of the Father, who has explained him

NOTES

Wednesday, December 6
Jesus became a human being for our sakes
Philippians 2:3-8

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

God came to us because he wanted to join us on the road, to listen to our story, and to help us realize that we are not walking in circles but moving towards the house of peace and joy. This is the great mystery of Christmas that continues to give us comfort and consolation: we are not alone on our journey. The God of love who gave us life sent his only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that he walks with us. -- Henri Nouwen

- Why do you think Jesus wanted to be with us?
- Do you believe that God is on your side? Or have you been influenced by the belief that God is distant and judgmental, watching and waiting for you to mess up?
- What changes for you when you know – really know -- that God is actively for you?

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plain
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

-- English lyrics 1862 to music of a French carol

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

vs. 6 He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.

NOTES

Thursday, December 7
The Maker becomes human
1 John 1:1-3

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Man's Maker was made man
that He, Ruler of the stars, might
nurse at His mother's breast;
that the Bread might hunger, the
Fountain thirst, the Light sleep,
the Way be tired on its journey;
that Truth might be accused of
false witness, the Teacher be beat-
en with whips, the Foundation
be suspended on wood; that Strength
might grow weak; that the Healer might
be wounded; that Life might die."

-- Augustine (Homilies on the First Epistle of John:1)

- What must it have been like for God to become human, to take a name and face, to voluntarily experience limitations?
- Imagine that you were a shepherd sent by the angels to the Bethlehem stable. What would you say to Jesus?

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; Come and behold him Born the King of Angels: O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

-- English translation 1841 from earlier Latin

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in – we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us."

NOTES

Friday, December 8
The Kindness of God
Titus 3:4-7

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

If you don't want to die of thirst in the desert of this world, let your soul drink of God's love. This is the fountain God has chosen to place here in this world, to keep us from fainting on our way home to Him.
-- Augustine

- What does it mean to you that Paul describes Jesus as "the kindness of God"?
- Tonight before you go to sleep, say out loud three things in "the ordinary stuff of your life" for which you are grateful to Jesus for his kindness.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare him room, And heaven and nature sing, And heaven and nature sing, And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing. -- Isaac Watts 1719

NOTES

Saturday, December 9

In his name we hope

Matthew 12:9-21

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

You and I, we're born searchers, always hunting for that something we sense behind the films that make us cry, the music that makes us shout, the feelings that make us want to possess the love of another person. We the seekers, we look "everywhere for footprints of the Divine, whose challenge we have felt, and upon whose reality" we gamble our very life. -- Timothy Willard

- What is it that you deep-down hope for from Jesus?
- What is your take-away from Willard's observation that we are gambling our very life on God's reality?

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
--words by Charles Wesley 1744

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

vs. 21 the mere sound of his name will signal hope, even among far-off unbelievers

NOTES

Sunday, December 10 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

A young woman and an angel

Luke 1:26-35

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

God, in his mercy, does not tell us everything our yes will mean. Most likely, Mary did not understand everything her yes would mean. She had much to ponder; however, she still gave God permission to work in and through her life as he saw fit. Like Mary, we don't have to know everything our yes will mean; we just have to yield ourselves, trusting God.

-- Kimberly Hahn

- Does God sometimes treat you as he did Mary, not telling everything that your “yes” to him will mean? Is it scary? Why?
- Does your “yes” sometimes lead to more than you bargained for? What keeps you going in those situations?

The angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame; “All hail”, said he, “thou lowly maiden Mary, most highly favoured lady.” Gloria.

-- Gabriel's Message – a 19th century Basque folk carol

NOTES

Monday, December 11
A Baby who is God with us
Matthew 1:18-25

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

For what we need to know, of course, is not just that God exists, not just that beyond the steely brightness of the stars there is a cosmic intelligence of some kind that keeps the whole show going, but that there is a God right here in the thick of our day-by-day lives who may not be writing messages about himself in the stars but in one way or another is trying to get messages through our blindness as we move around down here knee-deep in the fragrant muck and misery and marvel of the world. It is not objective proof of God's existence that we want but the experience of God's presence. That is the miracle we are really after, and that is also, I think, the miracle that we really get."
-- Frederick Buechner

- What is your reaction to Buechner's insistence that it is God's presence we need, rather than rational proof that he exists?
- What does it look like in your daily life to experience God's presence?
- What can you do during Advent to become more attuned to his ways of showing that he is your hope, comfort and consolation.

Ding dong! Merrily on high, In heav'n the bells are ringing: Ding dong! Verily the sky Is riv'n with angel singing, Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis! -- Translated from 16th century French carol

NOTES

Tuesday, December 12

Good news

Luke 4:14-21

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

If there were such a thing as
archaeologists of the soul, they
might reconstruct all that has
gone before from shame and love,
two everlasting columns that rise
into time though everything else
is worn away.

-- Mark Helprin

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.
-- 16th century English carol

• Jesus says There is a disconnect between how I see you and how you see yourself.

Why is God's version of our story good news?

• What is your personal balance between shame and love? How does Jesus' good news affect this balance?

NOTES

Wednesday, December 13
People the Father is looking for
John 4:23

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

The Incarnation tells central truths concerning both God and us. If God became human without ceasing to be God and without compromising the integrity of the creature that he became, {then} God must not be a competitor with his creation. In many of the philosophies of modernity God is construed as a threat to human well-being...God must be eliminated if humans are to be fully themselves. But there is none of this in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Word does indeed become human, but nothing of the human is destroyed in the process; God does indeed enter into his creation, but the world is thereby enhanced and elevated. The God capable of incarnation is not a competitive supreme being but rather, in the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the sheer act of being itself, that which grounds and sustains all of creation, the way a singer sustains a song.

-- Robert Barron

In the bleak mid-winter, A stable-place sufficed, The Lord God Almighty — Jesus Christ..... What can I give Him, Poor as I am? — If I were a Shepherd I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man I would do my part, — Yet what I can I give Him, — Give my heart.

-- In the Bleak Mid-Winter - Christina Rossetti 1872

- Jesus says there is a disconnect between who you are and who you want to be. Why do you think God insists that we be honest with him? Is it scary for you?
- Tell God a secret that is at your very core.
- What song is God singing in your soul? Try to sing a few of the notes.

NOTES

Thursday, December 14
Hear my words and act upon them
Luke 6:47-48

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

[To have faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that he says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to him, it must follow

that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because he has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of heaven is already inside you.

-- C.S. Lewis

- What “rivers” in your life are threatening to sweep you away?
- Jesus tells us to work His words into our lives. Are you doing that? How?

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, All seated on the ground, The angel of the Lord came down, And glory shone around, And glory shone around. “Fear not,” said he, for mighty dread, Had seized their troubled minds; “Glad tidings of great joy I bring, To you and all mankind, To you and all mankind.

-- 16th century English carol

Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message*:

If you work my words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who dug deep and laid the foundation of his house on bedrock. When the river burst its banks and crashed against the house, nothing could shake it; it was built to last.

NOTES

Friday, December 15
Watch what God does and then you do it
Ephesians 5:1-2

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

We should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned that He should bother to call us by name, our mouths wide open at His love, bewildered that at this very moment we are standing on holy ground.

-- Brennan Manning

- How do you “watch what God does”?
- Paul implies in Ephesians 5 that daily life with God is all about turning second hand information (what we read in the Gospels) into first hand experience. How do you do that?

Infant holy, Infant lowly, For His bed a cattle stall; Oxen lowing,
Little knowing, Christ the Babe is Lord of all. Swift are winging
Angels singing, Noels ringing, Tidings bringing, Christ the Babe is
Lord of all.

-- 13th century Polish carol

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how

Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

NOTES

Saturday, December 16
God is shaping our souls
Romans 8:29

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

This is the God of the gospel of grace. A God who, out of love for us, sent the only Son He ever had wrapped in our skin. He learned how to walk, stumbled and fell, cried for His milk, sweated blood in the night, was lashed with a whip and showered with spit, was fixed to a cross, and died whispering forgiveness on us all.

-- Brennan Manning

- Put into your own words what it means that God is shaping us “along the same lines as the life of his Son”?
- Because we are not lost and alone in our struggles, tell God the one place where you are “out of shape”.

Good Christian men, rejoice, With heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave; Peace! Peace! Jesus Christ was born
to save! Calls you one and calls you all, To gain his everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

-- translated from 14th century Latin and tune is 14th century
German carol

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored.

NOTES

Sunday, December 17 - 3rd Sunday of Advent

God of all Mercies

2 Corinthians 1:2-5

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Here are the two best prayers I know: "Help me, help me, help me," and "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

-- Anne Lamott

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

-- William Chatterton Dix 1865

- We often talk about God's mercy, but usually at a high level, e.g., salvation. What are two practical synonyms for mercy that you see in God's interactions with you personally?

- Does Lamott's prayer sound familiar to you? What is your "4 am prayer" when your life seems dark?

NOTES

Monday, December 18
Jesus the Beautiful Shepherd
John 10:11-18

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

But what I would like to say is that the spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else, that says, "You are the beloved and on you my favor rests"... I want you to hear that voice. It is not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice. It comes from a very deep place. It is soft and gentle. I want you to gradually hear that voice. We both have to hear that voice and to claim for ourselves that that voice speaks the truth, our truth. It tells us who we are.

-- Henri Nouwen

Jesus our brother, kind and good
Was humbly born in a stable rude
And the friendly beasts around Him stood,
Jesus our brother, kind and good.

-- The Friendly Beasts, a 12th century French carol

- The word shepherd has little relevance in modern life.

Choose the best synonym for you: Jesus is the Beautiful ____.

- Jesus says I know you. And you know me. When you hear the voice of Jesus in your heart, what does it sound like?

NOTES

Tuesday, December 19
See things from Jesus' perspective
Colossians 3:1–2

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

You have traveled too fast over false ground; Now your soul has come to take you back. Take refuge in your senses, open up to all the small miracles you rushed through.

-- John O'Donohue

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel

-- O Little Town of Bethlehem, a 19th century American carol

- Ask yourself this question: what did I really see this day?
- Think of an example over the past week in which you were “shuffling along” and may have missed what Jesus wanted you to see.
- What can you change so that you can increasingly see from Jesus' perspective?

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.

NOTES

Wednesday, December 20
God is greater than our worried hearts
1 John 3:18-20

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Last night, as I was sleeping,
I dreamt – marvelous error! –
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart
and the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures...
Last night as I slept,
I dreamt – marvelous error! –
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.
-- Antonio Machado

- John describes God’s love as a “salve” that soothes our hearts. Where are your deepest places of self-criticism that need this salve?
- What do you think about the idea that God is turning our mistakes and failures into white combs and sweet honey? Is it:
 - 1) too good to be true or
 - 2) a dream come true?Why did you choose it?

Hark! The herald-angels sing “Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled”
Joyful all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies
With the angelic host proclaim “Christ is born in Bethlehem”
Hark! The herald-angels sing “Glory to the new-born king”
-- 18th century English carol

Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message* :

My dear children. Let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.

NOTES

Thursday, December 21
The unforced rhythms of grace
Matthew 11:28-30

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

For those who feel their lives are a grave disappointment to God, it requires enormous trust and reckless, raging confidence to accept that the love of Jesus Christ knows no shadow of alteration or change. When Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened," he assumed we would grow weary, discouraged, and disheartened along the way.

These words are a touching

testimony to the genuine humanness of Jesus. He had no romantic notion of the cost of discipleship. He knew that following Him was as unsentimental as duty, as demanding as love.

-- Brennan Manning

- What "unforced rhythms of grace" do you need to pull into your own life rhythms?
- What word would you choose to complete this sentence: When the gates of light were thrown open and God drew his face, the world was saturated with _____. Why did you choose this word?

Hark how the bells, Sweet silver bells, All seem to say,
Throw cares away, Christmas is here, Bringing good cheer,
To young and old, Meek and the bold. Ding dong ding dong
That is their song, With joyful ring, All caroling.

-- Carol of the Bells Ukrainian folk chant 1914

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

NOTES

Friday, December 22

What are we really waiting for?

James 5:7-8

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

...we wait; and hope appears if we truly desire to see it.

-- Anne Lamott

The first Noel the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in
fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping
their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was
so deep:
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
Born is the King of Israel.

-- The First Noel – a 19th century Cornish carol

• When you honestly reflect on your life, what have you really been waiting for? Is it to be perfect, to be liked, to be accepted, to be happy...?

• James urged us to be patient and strong while God matures our soul. What have you learned this Advent that will increase your patience toward God? How about toward yourself?

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that.

Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.

NOTES

Saturday, December 23
Jesus' light shines on us
Ephesians 5:8-14

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Thou, Who are called the true fountain of light and wisdom, and the highest beginning, vouchsafe to pour upon the darkness of my understanding, in which I was born, the double beam of Thy brightness, removing from me all darkness of sin and ignorance.

-- Thomas Aquinas

Once in royal David's city,
Stood lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby,
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little Child.
-- 19th century English carol

- In your intimate life with God, where do you need “the double beam of his brightness”?
- Paul wrote “Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.” Jesus said, “work my words into your life.” How are these sentences related?

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true – these are actions appropriate for daylight hours.
Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.

NOTES

Christmas Eve
The Baby in Bethlehem
Luke 2:1-20

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

Glad is the world and fair this
night,
With stars above its head,
And the hall is filled with laugh-
ter and light,
And fires are burning red.
The bells of Paradise now ring
With bells of Christendom,
And Gloria, Gloria we will sing
That God on earth has come.
-- JRR Tolkien Advent poem
written 1936 and recently
discovered

- Find a few minutes to get away by yourself to reread the Christmas story (Luke 2:1-20).
- Whisper to Jesus your thanks for loving you AS IS.

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
-- Silent Night was first performed on Christmas Eve 1818

NOTES

Christmas Day
The Son of God has come
2 Cor 4:6-7

Reflections & Songs of the Church

For Your Reflection

There were only a few shepherds at the first Bethlehem. The ox and the donkey understood more of the first Christmas than the high priests in Jerusalem. And it is the same today ... Christ always seeks the straw of the most desolate cribs to make his Bethlehem
-- Thomas Merton

And all the bells on earth shall ring, On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day; And all the bells on earth shall ring, On Christmas Day in the morning. And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing, On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day; And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing, On Christmas Day in the morning. And all the souls on earth shall sing, On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day; And all the souls on earth shall sing, On Christmas Day in the morning.
-- I Saw Three Ships – a 17th century carol

- What's your takeaway from Paul's insistence that we understand God through the "bright and beautiful" face of Jesus?
- What do you know about God that you wouldn't have known without Jesus?
- Look back at what you wrote on the 1st Sunday of Advent in describing your life with God. Has Advent changed anything for you? How would you rewrite your sentence?

Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message* :

It started when God said, "light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful. If you look only at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our unadorned lives.

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Readings compiled and reflections written by Bryant Burroughs



MR

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