



*Meditations for*

# **ADVENT**

Duke Divinity School 2022



## Introduction

The Advent journey to the Christmas season is guided by the Spirit who spoke through prophets like Isaiah and by the songs of God's people. One of these songs I learned from the Metodista community that I pastored in Durham, the "Canto para pedir posada." Translated as "A song to plead for lodging," this song forms the centerpiece of the Advent tradition of Las Posadas, practiced across Latin America and among Latinx communities in the United States.

"Canto para pedir posada" is sung around the closed door of a home. One group takes the part of Mary and Joseph and call from the outside, while the owners of the house respond from within. Echoing the holy family's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, outsiders seek shelter and are regarded with suspicion by insiders. Eventually, refusal gives way to recognition of the Word that Mary bears. The doors open and a "new we" is born as all share in food, fellowship, and fiesta with piñatas.

Singing the "Canto para pedir posada" in the streets of Durham oriented my congregation's Advent journey. It was more than a commemoration of a picturesque gospel story but rather a commitment to listen to the cry of those who seek posada, even if what we had to offer was as humble as a blanket on a bare floor. Refugees and immigrants walk the same road trod by Mary and Joseph. In opening our doors and dreams to them, we welcome Christ.



The meditations that you read from the Duke Divinity community summon us to join the "canto para pedir posada." They are Advent postcards, markers of mercy, Pentecost piñatas. May this time of shared reflection help us rediscover the hospitality of God and the "new we" that comes from asking and offering posada.

### **Edgardo Colón-Emeric**

*Dean of Duke Divinity School, Irene and William McCutchen Associate Professor of Reconciliation and Theology, and Director of the Center for Reconciliation*

## 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT NOVEMBER 27, 2022

### *Isaiah 2:1–5*

Advent is the season of waiting and anticipating the coming of our Lord, and during this time it is worth asking, “And with the Lord’s arrival, what happens?” The incarnational logic of Advent suggests that in the Son becoming flesh, the inbreaking of God’s kingdom and order is at hand. Such political language can be cumbersome for us to navigate, especially since it can invoke reference points that are unappealing. Still, this language of God’s kingdom and order is important for insight into what Jesus has done. Isaiah 2:1–5 helps us understand that work in a broad and inclusive way.

One senses from this passage that God’s kingdom is public and therefore for all. “All the nations shall stream to [YHWH’s mountain]. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH’.” Customs and traditions surrounding Advent might depict it as a Christian season of looking inward, but in light of Isaiah’s imagery, we can say that it also involves looking outward to the good of the nations. Notice: the nations want to come to YHWH’s mountain. This kingdom is desirable and beneficial to the nations because it is marked by holy teaching, unbiased justice, and radical peace. Let us rejoice that God’s kingdom has come and is coming! And during this Advent season, may we understand ourselves as ambassadors of God’s reign for the good of all.



**Daniel Castelo**

*William Kellon Quick Professor of Theology and Methodist Studies*







## 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 4, 2022

### *Isaiah 11:1–10*

The temptation begins as soon as I open Facebook on my iPad in the morning or turn on the TV news or open any social media apps on my phone or . . . (this list threatens to run on ad nauseum). The temptation is to have my attention (and very soul) hijacked by some story, some image, some soundbite that is offered to entice me to wade into outrage and disgust. Modern life, thy name is clickbait. It does not matter whether you are conservative or progressive. The temptation is pervasive, a fruit having been snatched from the tree and handed to each one of us. We all are surrounded by media calling us to capitulate to reactionary anger, perpetually drawn by our eyes and ears into some kind of self-congratulatory Phariseism, whether political, religious, or cultural.

That danger is why this season of focusing on the Coming One is a counterbalancing gift. More precisely, the gift is Jesus, the Messiah who consistently lived and acted in heavenly ways that are so elusive for us. Indeed, given the prophecy describing this Messiah in Isaiah 11, is there doubt about Jesus' ability to pursue a better way to deal with the temptations of media? He is the One who "shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth" (Isaiah 11:3–4).



God, grant me the grace to click what Jesus would click.

**Lester Ruth**

*Research Professor of Christian Worship*

## 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 11, 2022

### *Luke 1:46b–55*

Advent celebrates a season of great expectancy, reminding us that all things are possible with God. Luke's Gospel transcends ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries and presents Jesus as a Savior who came for all people. Luke provides both salvific and social empowerment for people pushed to the margins, while also condemning the social system of marginalization. As a religious and ethnic minority, Mary's song of praise, also known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46b–55), is her response to the realization that all things really are possible with God as she celebrates her unlikely assignment to give birth to the Savior.

Reminiscent of the song Hannah sang in anticipating Samuel's birth (1 Samuel 2:1–10), Mary's song speaks about God bringing together both past and future in the present moment of Mary's joy. While referencing a fulfillment of messianic promises (v. 55), the Magnificat shifts in tense as God looked (past) with favor on Mary's lowliness, such that all generations will (future) call her blessed (vv. 48–49). Mary's spiritual fortune shows that God's blessings flow to all who fear God (v. 50), with a reversal of fortunes demonstrated when the most important blessing God could ever give would flow through Mary, a poor teenager from the working-class town of Nazareth.



We should all share Mary's excitement, as the Magnificat celebrates infinite possibilities. Ending food scarcities, undoing systemic racism, and achieving gender equality are all possible with God. Indeed, all things are possible with God.

#### **Jonathan C. Augustine**

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and Board of Visitors member at Duke Divinity School*





## 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 18, 2022

### *Matthew 1:18–25*

Joseph had made up his mind. Final decision. He was resolved to dismiss Mary quietly. Then in a dream the angel of the Lord showed up and told him to think and act differently. Amazingly, Joseph woke up and did just what the angel said. He took Mary as his wife, the baby was born, and he named him Jesus, just like he had been advised to do.

Oh, if only changing our minds were as easy as it appears to be in this Scripture! To wake up from a revelatory dream and think or do something life changing, immediately, is beyond our imagination today.

Was it really that easy? How much agonizing did Joseph do? Did he talk to others whom he trusted? Did he pray? Did he weigh the pros and the cons? Joseph was a Jew, a descendent of David, so he surely was steeped in the both the Scriptures and the culture of the time. It would have been easier to do what he resolved to do before he had the dream. And Mary—how patient she had to be while waiting to learn her fate.



Often, we have a very hard time changing our minds, even when we know God is leading us to see things in new light. And how patient are we when we are hoping for others to change their minds? May this Advent season bring light to God's message for us today, and may we have clarity in our seeing, hearing, thinking, and waiting.

#### **Susanne Priddy**

*Pastor, Wesleyan Chapel UMC (Wilmington, N.C.)  
and President of the National Alumni Council at Duke Divinity School*

## CHRISTMAS EVE DECEMBER 24, 2022

### *Luke 2:2–14*

Luke 2:1–14 is remarkable for many reasons, not least because of the presence of angelic hosts. Sure, Matthew's description has traveling kings and an amazing star, but Luke's has the glory of the Lord. Despite lowly origins, Jesus' birth is heralded by an earthly appearance of an entire choir of celestial beings.

But even with these incredible elements to Luke's telling of the story, Christians tend to focus on the shepherds who received the announcement. This has a great deal to do with the fact that they heard it first. Our culture teaches that being first is what really matters. Some have even come to think of second place as a type of first—the first loser. Anything to be number one! But is that the message God wants us to receive and proclaim?

Luke's Advent story is about the pronouncement and confirmation of the arrival of Christ coming to those in last place, not to social first stringers like the Pharisees or Sadducees but to back-benchers and also-rans like the shepherds. He emphasizes this point later when Jesus is brought to the temple and his anointing is confirmed by the aged (Simeon) and the widowed (Anna). As we reflect on the coming of the Messiah and anticipate the second coming, let us remember how God's cloud of witnesses confirming Jesus as the Messiah included not only angels but “stones the builders refused” (see Luke 20:17). It seems that, in God's eyes, last isn't such a bad place to be.



**Quinton Dixie**

*Associate Research Professor of the History of Christianity in the United States and Black Church Studies*







## CHRISTMAS DAY DECEMBER 25, 2022

### *Isaiah 9:2–7*

Today we arrive at the joyful celebration of Jesus' birth—Christmas Day! I wonder what particular circumstances mark this Christmas for each of us. Do we recognize and receive Jesus' birth as a shining light, as the prophet Isaiah describes? Or do we receive Jesus' birth as those who are living through a deep darkness?

The biblical witness reminds us that “a child has been born for us” (Isaiah 9:6), whether we enter this day in a season characterized by darkness or light. The shepherds teach us that receiving the announcement of Jesus' birth in the darkness can bring joy. Just as the angels proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds in the middle of the night, God can encounter us in the darkness of our lives, families, and societies, most especially on this Christmas Day.

We hear, and perceive, and encounter God made human in Jesus Christ within the dark: the dark of holy preparation in Advent, the dark of our daily struggles, or the dark of God's good creation as we stare in awe at the stars.



Thanks be to God that the joy of God's coming to earth in the birth of Mary's baby boy meets us wherever we are, whether in darkness or light. And thanks be to God that as we celebrate Christmas this year, in darkness or light, we can cling to Isaiah's proclamation that Jesus' birth has established the continual growth of God's justice on the earth.

**Sarah Jean Barton**

*Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy and Theological Ethics*