

# Make Straight the Pathway



Central Catholic  
Community Advent Reflections

## Introduction

For centuries the season of Advent has been a time of reflection and preparation for the birth of Jesus. Various traditions during the advent season abound. However, the one thing that everyone, who celebrates Advent, can focus on is preparing themselves and their community to welcome Christ into their homes, communities, and themselves. Too often we find ourselves so wound up in the hustle and bustle of the season that once Christmas does arrive we're too worn-down, we've eaten too much, and we do not have any energy to be mindful of the arrival of Jesus.

"Make straight the pathway" is an initiative to gather together some of Central's community reflections on this time of simplification and preparation. We come to learn through each other's reflections that each of our stories interacts with scripture in a different way and that the Word of God speaks to each of us, no matter our station in life. In doing so, we might come recognize that each of our lives is weaved in with the story of God's presence in our world—creating a rich and vibrant tapestry.

Through the grace of God we are given a great Hope in this season. A Hope that forgives, renews, and makes us into a new creation in Christ. This work of making all things new is God's gracious gift to each of us and to the world. How will you pay that forward and be God's grace for someone else?

- Lasallian Ministry



## **Sunday, December 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Isaiah 2: 1-5 † Psalm 122 † Romans 13: 11-14 † Matthew 24:37-44**

As we converge towards the Christmas season, it is very easy to be swept up in all the excitement. Many people, like myself, look towards Christmas and all the joys that come on that special day. However, without the season of Advent there would not be as much spiritual joy on Christmas Day. Advent is a time to lead us closer to Christ and examine our lives and prepare our hearts for his coming.

The first reading from Isaiah really exemplifies opening our hearts to prepare the way for the Lord. Isaiah also goes on to speak of Jesus power over the world. He says, “He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many people.” This little excerpt shows the power of Christ, and what he will do for his people in the world. Jesus, allowing himself to be born as a vulnerable infant shows what he is willing to do for his people.

The second reading from the Letters to the Romans warns to prepare us for Christ’s coming. Although at the time when St. Paul is writing this Christ was already deep in his teachings and mission, we have a lot to learn for the coming of Christ at Christmas in 2019. St. Paul teaches us that we are to come out of darkness and accept Christ wholeheartedly. He goes on to tell the Romans that in order to get ready for Christ we must act according to what he teaches and not act foolish and let light shine forth from all the darkness. For me personally, this is very difficult to do during Advent. All I can ever think about is what’s going to be under my tree. More importantly though, it is important to think of all the people that will not wake up on Christmas with a tree and gifts. During the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season it is extremely easy to get swept away. Many of us are at the age where we should be thinking about the real meaning of Christmas. Our Lord and Saviors entrance into humanity in the form of an infant.

One thing Central does very well, in my opinion, is helping to lead its students closer to that meaning of Christmas. We are given many opportunities at Central to prepare our hearts to receive Jesus. One opportunity that I enjoy doing is going to the PA Lutheran Center for the Blind and help serve them dinner. This year I am going to their Christmas dinner to help serve them. Seeing the joy on the people’s faces not only brings a sliver of joy to me, but an abundance to them. This is what St. Paul is really talking about. It’s the small interactions with people that brighten their spirits and bring light into their lives. You never know, you may just make someone’s Christmas.

-Anthony Cognetti, Class of 2020

**Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Isaiah 4:2-6 † Psalm 122 † Matthew 8: 5-11**

In Isaiah 4:2-6, Isaiah discusses judgement day, this reading works perfectly with the Gospel because of Jesus's teaching about the importance of humility and faith to reach heaven. Isaiah goes on to explain that if one wants to enter the Kingdom of God, they must first "survive" life on earth, meaning, live a life of faith and do not fall into the temptations of the devil. "The branch of the LORD will be luster and glory, and the fruit of the earth will be honor and splendor for the survivors of Israel." Isaiah says that if we are to reach Heaven, then the reward will be great, eternity with God in peace. As disciples of Christ in the present, we all feel the pressure and temptation to stray away from God. In times such as these, we must remember what is told to us by Isaiah and "survive" these temptations and be the hands and feet of Christ.

In Mathew 8:5-11 Jesus speaks to a centurion, a Roman soldier, who is in need. Jesus challenges the centurion, questioning his faith in the Son of God. When Jesus enters the house and talks to the servant, the servant says that he is a servant to God, and Jesus heals him. The centurion, who is a very powerful Roman man, not only admits to being a believer of Christ and all his works but also calls himself a servant of God, showing Jesus that even though he is a man of prominence and power, he still knows that God is more powerful. This act of reducing his power in the face of Christ shows Jesus that the centurion truly believes and he is in need of His aid. This leads to Jesus' quote, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 11). In this he is explaining to his disciples that the centurion will sit at God's table in heaven because of his faith and humility. As believers in Christ, we must thank God for the gifts and bits of power he has given us on Earth, but we must stay humble and recognize that he is omnipotent, we must not forget where we came from and where we will return.

-Sergio Visco, Class of 2020

**Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Isaiah 11: 1-10 † Psalm 72 † Luke 10: 21-24**

The reading from Isaiah says that with the power of the Lord anything is possible. From a stump of a dead tree a sprout is growing. From a line with all its members dead, its family lineage continues. Then it talks about when the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon “him”, that they will have wisdom, understanding, and fear of the Lord. It lists events that we would consider natural absurdities like the wolf being a guest of the lamb, and the calf and the lion together. The child playing at the head of a cobra’s den. With the understanding of the Lord all will live in peace together. There is “no harm or ruin on Earth”. This is a vision of peace among enemies, and when that day comes “The Gentiles will seek out the people from every nation.” In conclusion this reading is the vision or hope for harmony between all of the different cultures and ideas.

In the responsorial psalm we see the response is: “Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever”. This line appears five times followed by the great things that are to happen. Just like the first reading, it is the hope and vision that we aspire to be. We aspire to live in perfection and we try to come as close as possible, but we know perfection for us impossible. Only in heaven, and by the power of God can perfection be achieved. Just like the first reading, a dream that can only be achieved in heaven, but a dream we must try to chase here while we are alive.

-George Panousis, Class of 2020

## **Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**

### **Isaiah 25: 6-10 † Psalm 23 † Matthew 15: 29-37**

The theme that I found prevalent in the scripture for the first Wednesday of Advent was that we can always rely on God to provide for us. The scripture relates to Advent as it displays the idea of waiting and patience in the Lord, just as everyone had to have patience for the birth of Jesus Christ. The Gospel was from Matthew 15: 29-37, which is the story of Jesus multiplying seven loaves of bread and a few fish into enough food to feed a crowd of thousands of followers.

The main thing that I take away from this story is that we need to have faith in God for he will always provide what we need. It is sometimes easy to get caught up in praying for the things that we want and get upset when God does not give them to us. We should instead be grateful for what we have and have faith that God will lead us to where we need to be in life. Similarly, the responsorial psalm and first reading uses creative metaphors to describe how God is ultimately leading our souls to where they should be. For example, the responsorial psalm says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul." This made it easy to picture us as "God's sheep" following his lead with complete trust, as he leads us to safety and keeps us in line. The thing I find most frustrating with having faith in God providing is that I sometimes expect immediate results. It is important to remember that God works in His own time and that everything happens for a reason. We must be careful not to lose our faith if God does not work a miracle after we pray for something and it does not change within the next couple of days. I think once we learn this and can understand it, then God's plans for us will just naturally become more apparent. Finally, this scripture simply reminded me that God is on our side at all times. The more that we remember this, the more patience we will have to wait and see what God's plan is for us. If we live out our faith with God as our best friend and trust him, our lives will be full of pure joy.

-Nick Giannetta, Class of 2020

**Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 26: 1-6 † Psalm 118 † Matthew 7:21, 24-27**

The reading for today stands out to me as one that talks about the greatness of the Lord and the Gospel is about trusting in God and everything will work out. The first reading says how God will raise up a King descended from David himself and will be a good and righteous king. This “king” Jeremiah is referring to is Jesus Christ and his coming to Earth. One quote that stand out to me is, “As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: ‘The LORD our justice.’” This is the perfect summary of what Jesus Christ does because he does rule us with great wisdom and is just. He also came and saved us all from sin when he was crucified which gave us all new security. Without him making that sacrifice we would all fall deeply in sin and would not be able to be saved from it. Even the responsorial psalm speaks about how Jesus will rule over us and it will be a wonderful time of glory.

The gospel talks about Joseph and how he finds out Mary is pregnant with a child that is not his. At first, he wants to quietly divorce her because he does not want to shame her and create a big public scene about it. Then, an angel appears and tells him to trust in God and that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is a good example of something we can try to work on during this Advent season to better prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. God wants us to open our hearts to him but to do that we must trust in him and the plan that he has prepared for us.

-Andrew Koltas, Class of 2020

**Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 29:17-24 † Psalm 27 † Matthew 9:27-31**

The part of the first reading that stood out to me was the phrase, “And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see. The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD”. This selection jumped out at me because I felt a rushing feeling of hope upon reading this. I felt hope because this shows that despite what our current lives are like, we can always find salvation in God. Even in the darkest hour of our lives, God can be the light that shines through. The responsorial psalm and gospel continued the theme that God and Jesus are the light in our darkness, and that through them anything is possible.

While the selections for this day do not explicitly mention prayer within them, there is an important message that could be taken from them towards prayer. I interpreted this as we are always able to turn to God. Even when we feel most abandoned and separated from God in our lives, we can still turn to him for help.

In the gospel, the blind men that were healed “went out and spread word of him through all that land” after being healed by Jesus. This shows that we should live out our own faith by spreading the word because we too have been saved, our souls have been healed through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

These passages related to Advent because of the recurring theme that Jesus is a light in the darkness. In the time of Advent, the world starts to become rather gloomy outside as life begins to die, yet in our faith Jesus is born and life begins to return to the world again. Jesus’ birth is believed to be the light that saves the world from the darkness that it is trapped within.

The first reading resonated with me the most out of everything. I believe this was because of the underlying message of hope that was throughout the entire reading. It speaks of anyone being able to be saved through God, despite their lives and their circumstances. I connected with this specifically because I can see the world being affected by the negativity and all the darkness within it, but we can all still be saved through the light that is God.

-Jonathan Farkos, Class of 2020



**Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26 † Psalm 147 † Matthew 9: 35-10:1, 5, 6-8**

The first reading starts out with a metaphor that holds a prophecy about the coming of Jesus. Isaiah writes that, “No longer will your Teacher hide himself, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher.” The quote is explaining that people do not need to wait for Jesus much longer, as he is going to reveal himself in the near future. This passage relates to the Advent season because we are preparing for the arrival of Jesus. The Bible has proclaimed the arrival of the Son of God, and the Advent season is the arrival of Jesus.

The passage from Isaiah relates strongly to faith because it is calling for us to place our trust in God through our actions. Isaiah writes that “This is the way; walk in it, when you would turn to the right or to the left.” The only way that we are able to grow in the faith is through God and believing in him. We can become better people through God, and the only way to grow in life and to grow in God. Through faith and practicing good actions, we can grow closer to God. This is important because Advent is all about deepening in relationship with God in every aspect of our lives. We grow closer to him in the Advent season by reading Scripture, praying to Jesus and God, and through living out the faith.

The amount of life and love that God promises to his followers jumped out at me. Isaiah writes that, “He will give rain for the seed that you sow in the ground, and the wheat that the soil produces will be rich and abundant.” The rain is God’s power helping you grow in the faith, which is represented by the seed that grows in the soil. The wheat that grows from the soil represents the joy that is achieved by living out the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus. By putting our trust in Jesus and the works of God, we are able to see growth in our faith, but this is only able to happen when we fully trust God and his actions.

-John Evans, Class of 2021

## **Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

### **Isaiah 11: 1-10 † Psalm 72 † Romans 15: 4-9 † Matthew 3: 1-12**

Today, we observe the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and the day's readings well compliment the testament of this celebration. The first from Isaiah prophesizes the coming of Christ, both delineating the impartial paradigm of truth and righteousness to follow, and in so doing posing somewhat of a challenge in depicting what the world could and should be like in the fullest of God's image. The examples of erstwhile adversaries coexisting in harmony and disparate characters interacting serve applicable on a universal scale. Despite any and all differences, we are all joined by the common denominator of God's Kingdom. No divide or dispute is so strong lest it be able to be transcended by God's love.

The second reading, from Romans, speaks to Jesus' mission on earth and how we ought to persist in our endeavor to not only replicate but spread the work and word of God. This undertaking to emulate the precedent set by Jesus ineluctably comes up short, herein where lies a great paradox of the faith. By failure we draw nearer to God; believing that the challenges and the hardships that we face will be redeemed as we continue to follow God helps us to come closer to God. We communally have ascribed a certain stigma to failure, one that leads to a reluctance to address it which in turn presents a reality in which failure feels unique to us. But God is there to accept us and allow us to remedy our wrongdoings, blessing us with the precious gift of life, one of limitless possibility and opportunity to carry out his commission.

It seems more important now than ever- amidst all of the noise, all gratuitous impositions and unfounded expectations- that we give all that we have and all that we are to something bigger than ourselves. I think this sentiment is pertinent to the day's feast. In welcoming this unfamiliar and unprecedented commission, Mary partook in the ultimate exhibition of Faith in God and in God's plan, just as we are called to do as well.

-David Collins, Class of 2020

**Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Genesis 3:9-15,20† Psalm 98 † Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12 † Luke 1:26-38**

Advent calls us to repentance and a realization of the fundamental core of our beliefs. Today, we honor the glorious and miraculous Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother, an act of God's most profound mercy. Mercy is a gratuitous gift of God. By "gratuitous," we mean that it is not merited or earned. Mercy is not owed to us by God. If it were, it would not be mercy; it would be our right. But we have no right to mercy. God freely gives it, and it is given in abundance.

As for this glorious Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, it is essential to look at it as a gratuitous gift from two perspectives. First, the "Immaculate Conception" means that when God created the Blessed Virgin Mary, He created her without sin. This grace, given her, is an act of God's perfect and gratuitous mercy. She did not earn it or merit it; instead, God in His goodness chose to create her without original sin to have a suitable instrument by which the Son could come into the world. Mary, for her part, embraced this gift and chose to remain sinless throughout her life by a continual act of her free will. This is shown in the gospel reading today:

'Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.' Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

Mary is a role model for us. Many times, through veneration and prayer, we can forget precisely why Mary is the Mother of God. Mary might seem far from our everyday reality, but she is genuinely close to us. She knows what it is like to grow up in an uncertain time and was faced with adversity after adversity. She knew poverty and danger. She had the same free will of us all and chose to devote herself to God. We all can act just as she did and chose God, follow God, and Love God. As we look at ourselves today, how can we use Mary for a model for us?

- Ian Connolly, Class of 2020

**Tuesday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 40: 1-11 † Psalm 96 † Matthew 18: 12-14**

As the holiday season dwells upon us, many of us forget what our true focus is. We're often caught up in holiday shopping and presents and forget the true meaning of Advent. Advents help us prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ while understanding the role he played in our faith.

The first reading from Isaiah begins with a promise from God. It first introduces instructions to console the people of God. Thereafter, the oracle prepares and announces the coming of the Lord in accordance with the Word of God. This news brought great joy to the people of Israel after being under strict control. The herald brings the good tidings to Zion where the glory of God will reappear when He leads His people to heaven.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples The Parable of the Lost Sheep. In the parable, a man leaves ninety-nine sheep on the side of a mountain and seeks after the one that has gone astray. Even though leaving the ninety-nine other sheep is risky, the man still searches for the one in need. He abandons his normal routine and concentrates all of his energy on the lost one. The main takeaway is that God pursues the lost whether you a strong or weak believer. It helps us understand that if we feel lost God will always come for us.

During Advent, we are called to help and give to others to spread, not only the holiday joy but also the joy of Christ. All of today's verses have a true meaning, you will be rewarded for living God's word. The most important part to remember is that God is always there for you, even if we do not recognize it. Throughout the season there are various opportunities at Central give back to others. By serving and helping others you help spread the true meaning of Advent.

-Robert Wilson, Class of 2020

**Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 40: 25-31 † Psalm 103 † Matthew 11: 28-30**

Throughout these readings, it is apparent that there is a central theme of trusting in God. In the first reading, by the prophet Isaiah, there is a call to recognize God's omnipotence and His reign over the entire world. The prophet Isaiah stresses this by calling the reader to "Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things." Here, Isaiah implores the reader not to forget that God was the power that created everything that we know.

Later in the passage, Isaiah reaffirms the idea of trust in God by detailing how exactly God's power leads us in the right direction. "He leads out their army and numbers them, calling them all by name. By his great might and the strength of his power not one of them is missing!" Isaiah is saying that the Lord will always direct us in the right direction towards salvation and eternal life. God calls everyone to a life of faith, regardless of whether they are an avid believer or a firm non-believer.

In the Gospel, Jesus attempts to reinforce the theme of peoples' trust in Him. When Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest,' He is letting everyone know that we should turn to Him in times of need, and also, times of prosperity. This relates back to today's theme of trust in God, since we should always strive to see God in every experience that we have, whether it is joyful or hurtful.

Isaiah passes this along to remind us that we should fully trust God in all of His works. Whether one is enduring severe hardship or great joy, God always has a plan to lead each and every one of us towards salvation, whether we are extremely close with Him or whether we are rather distant from His love.

-Tim Ungarean, Class of 2020

**Thursday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Zechariah 2: 14-17 † Judith 13 † Luke 1: 26-38**

December 12<sup>th</sup> is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We celebrate this feast day to remember the visitation of Mary to Juan Diego in 1531.

In the first passage today, we see Zechariah writing about the coming of Jesus. We see him talking about God bringing together many nations to rejoice in his name. This helps us to prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It talks about God sending down Jesus to earth to save us. Zechariah is telling us that we must prepare a way for Jesus before he arrives to us here on earth. We must do what is necessary for the Son of God.

In the Gospel, we see the angel Gabriel visiting Mary and telling her she will give birth to the Son of the Most High. We see that Mary accepts God's plan for her and embraces God's will in her life. We must use Mary as an example of how we need to go about our days living God's plan in our lives. We must do the little things to show our appreciation for what God has sacrificed for us. He sent his only begotten son to save us from sin. We must live out God's plan in our lives in order to meet him one day in Heaven.

-Sam Marchand, Class of 2020

**Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 48: 17-19 † Psalm 1 † Matthew 11: 16-19**

In each of the passages there is the common theme of servitude, as well as, following that which God says to be good in the world. We are servants of God and each of these passages reminds us of this. Humanity is the extension of God's will on earth and thus, you must allow him to "lead you on the way you should go" and kindle the fire of faith deep inside all of us. In order for us as Catholics to live a life that is just, we must be in reverence to God and live by his will.

We are called to obey God throughout our lives no matter the circumstances, no matter the persecution, regardless of how others see us, we are called to serve. That is the most important idea I can gather from these readings. Even if others perceive us as bad or ill willed, we must choose to serve God and believe in his mission. Even when John was accused of being "possessed by a demon," he chose not to panic, but rather to follow his path. Even though it may be difficult in the modern world to ignore outside noise, it is more important than ever for people to remain true to themselves and embrace what they know to be true. The calling of God is not a difficult one, He just simply wants you to believe and serve.

All across the world, there is a stigma about Catholics and about the way they live their lives. Thus, it is our duty to break those preconceived notions and show others the way to salvation. It is the duty of all Catholic to teach others that which was given to us by Jesus. It is our job to be in tune with the faith so that we as well as others can continue to grow in community with Christ. Jesus is calling all of us, it is just up to you to answer that call.

Through each of these passages, we are given a mission by God to serve our community and keep true to the faith. We are called to reject those who would criticize us and embrace those that would encourage us. The calling of Christ is not a difficult one to answer, but is a difficult one to embrace. We must all come together and answer that call, aligning ourselves under Christ, living out the mission set forth by our Father, and embracing the faith we all hold so sacred.

-Thomas Hartnett, Class of 2020

**Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Sirach 48: 1-4, 9-11 † Psalm 80 † Matthew 17: 9-13**

Each year seems to get busier around the holiday season. The hectic planning of family coming into town, shopping, decorating, and everything in between seems to distract us. These secular worries associated with the holiday season cause us to forget to just slow down and be present in the moment of what is truly important: Christ in our lives who taught us about family.

The reading and gospel go hand-in-hand talking about the great Elijah who was one of God's most special prophets. He performed wondrous deeds and miracles before Christ inspiring many to worship the one true God. Many believed Jesus was in some ways Elijah, but he makes it clear that John the Baptist is the new Elijah who was promised to come again in the Old Testament.

It is quite amazing to see how structured the Bible is and the role that prominent figures play in the story. Many events and prophets all lead up to the Most High, Jesus Christ who saved our sins. Our God is infallible in His plan for the world and our faith. Everything is centered around Christ and we often forget that. Christ, with his parents Joseph and Mary, also showed us the true structure of being a family. While being reverent of Christ in our lives this Advent, also reflect on if you strive to follow Jesus' family. Are you slow to anger? Do you lead by example for everyone in the family to grow in the faith? Obviously, it is not easy, and we are not Mary or Joseph, but reflecting about how you can put others in your family before yourself can be a powerful goal this Advent and Christmas. I have often said I have been too busy for family time or have neglected being kinder to my sister and brother. But I am leaving for college very soon, and I know I do not have much time with them left. This Advent and Christmas, I pray that I can follow in the footsteps of the most Holy Family and act like a true, beloved son of Christ.

-Brian Dzuban, Class of 2020



## **Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10 † Psalms 146 † James 5: 7-10 † Matthew 11: 2-11**

In the reading from Isaiah we hear, “Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.” This stands out as sometimes we may forget that God is always working to save us, He will always look for us and seek us out, it is not that need to find God but it is for us to be found by Him and allow Him to lead us to our salvation. We are not the warriors defending God but his people who He wants the best for and works so that we may live in his love.

The Psalm continues in this theme of reveling in the glory of Gods protection, it says “The LORD God keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry...The LORD shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations.” In this I see a reminder of God’s eternal power, there is nothing he gains from accepting us and our faults, He made us in His image and loves us unconditionally, and there is no power He gains from us making Him greater through us. This then reminds me that there is no issue in reaching out to God for help in prayer as there is no burden too great for Him to bare that could come from me.

These ideas are great to focus on going into the Christmas season, we need to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ and bringing our burdens to God and asking for help and his forgiveness is the best way to go about it. In the next reading James says, “Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged.” We need to take care to not look for fault in others while not acknowledging our own faults. Calling out another person for their faults when you yourself are far from perfect is not what we should be doing leading into the Christmas season. We cannot ourselves be saved if we are putting others down for not being saved.

-Anthony Cummin, Class of 2020

**Monday, December 16<sup>th</sup>**

**Numbers 24:2-7 † Psalm 25 † Matthew 21: 23-27**

When reading the passage from Numbers 24:2-7, what jumps out to me is the way Balaam, son of Boer spoke. How he suddenly was filled with the spirit of God and spoke with his oracle, saying what he is seeing is true and he is hearing with God's ears. Balaam was saying he sees God, not now though but in the future and how God has the power to do this to a man. What also jumps out to me is the responsorial psalm, when reading it you are asking God for strength to be kind to all people. In addition, we learn about truth and compassion and how to not sin from God.

In Matthew 21: 23-27 it teaches us about living out the faith when it says "When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them in reply, "I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things." I believe this is living out the faith because people are asking questions and not just following blindly.

Even though Psalm 85:5 is very short it is still a very meaningful passage, it is just the people asking the Lord to show us his love and salvation. This psalm relates to Central because in class the teachers show us problems and help us out with them. They are very devoted to making sure we do well and in that sense, we respect them. This also relates to Christmas in how we ask for many things and the people that love us do their best to get them. Also, how God is in the Christmas spirit and brings everyone closer together with family and with friends.

-Harrison Smith, Class of 2020

**Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Genesis 49: 2, 8-10 † Psalm 72 † Matthew 1: 1-17**

In the first reading, Genesis 49:2, we see Jacob calling his sons, his last significant act as patriarch and as the heir to Abraham. It is also important to note that at the beginning of the blessing, Jacob realized he was both Jacob and Israel, and his sons are sons of each. Two main things struck me about this passage. The first thing that struck me was how Jacob prophesied blessings upon each of his sons, one-by-one, showing his attention to individuality. The second thing that struck me comes from the line “listen to Israel, your father”. In saying this, Jacob realizes that God made him Israel, and he did not achieve this by his own doing. In being self-less and able to not fall into the trap of pride, Jacob exemplifies the virtue of humility by showing how he gained his powerful position. This virtue of humility is something that is needed in every one of our lives today, in a society that is more prideful and conceited as ever.

In the Gospel for today, Matthew 1:1-17, the genealogy of Jesus Christ is discussed. In the overview of explaining this genealogy of Jesus Christ, Matthew clearly connects him to some of the greatest men in the history of the Old Testament. Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham, and later connects Jesus to David, showing that Jesus is the kingly Messiah promised from David’s royal line. The Old Testament prophesied that the anticipated Messiah would be the Son of David, and in the first line of the Gospel Matthew points to Jesus as the fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy. This passage should make every one of us more in awe and more thankful of Jesus. We should never forget how low the Lord stretched his love to save the fallen human race while being perfectly free from sin.

Throughout Advent, we should attempt to exemplify the virtue of humility, as well as give thanks to the Lord for all that has been bestowed upon us. Without this magnificent intercession by Jesus Christ, we would be completely lost.

-Claudio Simione, Class of 2020

**Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Jeremiah 23: 5-8 † Psalm 72 † Matthew 1: 18-25**

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land.” Although God is literally talking about King David, I believe that this a precursor for the coming of Christ. God knew that David would disobey him, I do not think God is actually talking about him. I think that God is talking about Jesus, who will rule without error.

“Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.” I think this means that when we enter heaven or “His time,” we will have peace forever. “He shall save the poor” means that God will save those who love Him and put Him first. He will not save those that are selfish and put their own lives first. We also need to be thankful for all the Lord has done for us. We need to recognize that without him, we would have nothing and be nothing. Because we know this, we need to spread his word. We need all the world to share in the glory of God.

In the Alleluia, we recognize the God gave us the sacred law, and we should follow it. Through his commandments, we know what we shall not do. This just reminds to try to stay away from sin and remember his law.

The gospel tells about how Joseph was going to divorce Mary because she conceived a child. An angel then came to Joseph and told him everything. The angel said that child was conceived through the Holy Spirit and that this child would be the Savior. Joseph listened to the angel and went back to Mary. Even though Joseph had to deal with this big issue of trust, he listened to God. When he spoke to him, he listened. Because he listened, he was rewarded with being in the presence of the savior.

-Colson Poillucci, Class of 2020

**Thursday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Judges 13:2-7, 24-25 † Psalm 71 † Luke 1:5-25**

This time of the year is very important for the Catholic Church and for Catholics all over the world. It is a time of joy, holiday cheer and celebration, but in all of that we tend to lose sight of the true meaning of Advent. Advent is a time of year where we are supposed to put everything aside and prepare for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ. As we reflect, we call to mind all God has done for us with the countless blessings he has bestowed on us and the many gifts we have received from him.

In the passages from Judges and Luke we see a common theme of a wife and her husband struggling with bearing a child. No matter how hard they try they are unable to conceive a child of their own, but instead of giving up they take their troubles to God. God saw their struggles and decided to answer their prayers with a child of their own. This miracle draws a parallel to the Virgin Mary who conceived a child of her own (our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ) purely from her belief in God's plan and the graces bestowed on her by God.

These stories prove that if we have a strong faith in the Lord, our God, and His ability to work His divine will through us carrying out miracles and other great works that anything is possible. Another part of the passage (Luke 1:5-25) that stood out to me was in the part of the story where Zechariah saw the angel Gabriel. He was startled at first and then quickly fell into disbelief questioning the angel Gabriel, as a result the angel took away his abilities to speak leaving Zechariah stunned. On the other hand, in the gospel passage (Judges 13:2-7, 24-25) we see Manoah and his wife immediately accept God's message not doubting Him in the slightest. As a result, they are rewarded for their unwavering faith and therefore are not burdened with any setbacks like Zechariah was. This shows that as followers of God we must put all of our beliefs in Him and His plan or we will run into setbacks like Zachariah which will only slow us down on our path to eternal salvation.

I feel like these passages relate perfectly to my time here at Central Catholic since faith is so important to me and Central Catholic as a whole. It is important for us since we must constantly use faith in our everyday lives to live out the Central mission and be men of faith, scholarship, and service.

-Joseph Cirilano, Class of 2020

**Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 7: 10-14 † Psalm 24 † Luke 1: 26-38**

“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you”. Today’s Gospel tells the story of the Annunciation; the moment when the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. This moment changes Mary’s life forever, testing her faith in God’s plan for her future. Her response sets the perfect example for us in following our faith this Advent season; she trusted in God and embraced His plan for her without doubt. Just like Mary, we need to be ready to welcome God into our lives when He comes to us. God has a plan for all of us, and with faith we can follow Him and live our lives as children of God. We must stay vigilant so that when we receive the call, we are ready to say yes, and follow the example Mary set before us.

The story of the Annunciation sets the scene for the entire Advent season. It marked the beginning of the end of the wait for a Messiah that spanned centuries. The salvation of humanity was at hand, and the person chosen by God to usher the savior into the world was a young woman, lacking power, wealth, or status. By worldly standards Mary was not special. She did not command immense power, status, or wealth. She was a common woman living a humble life married to a carpenter. However, what she lacked in power and wealth she made up for with an abundance of kindness and faith. She truly lived the virtue of being poor in material things but rich in spirit and would go on to be the mother of the Messiah and one of the holiest people to ever walk the Earth. Mary shows us that God does not care what walk of life we come from, He only cares about how we live the life we are given. He will call on people from the humblest of backgrounds to do His work in the world if they are rich in heart and faith. This Advent season, put yourself in Mary’s shoes and think about how you would respond if God called upon you. As Christmas and the new year get ever closer, try and find where God is guiding you, and prepare yourself to say yes when He calls you to action.

-Adam Sipe, Class of 2020

**Saturday, December 21**

**Song of Songs 2: 8-14 † Psalm 33 † Luke 1:5-25**

From Song of Songs 2:8-14, the reading painted a vivid picture in my head of the beautiful wildlife and nature God created along with this Earth. Animals are mentioned such as gazelles, young stag, and doves. Parts of nature are mentioned like mountains, hills, winter, rains, flowers, vines, figs, rocks, and cliffs. It helps the reader visualize the beauty in the scene and paints a vibrant picture. There is personification applied throughout with how God moves like the animals listed. How he can be as quick and majestic as a gazelle but could also be calm and graceful like dove flying around the clear sky. The shrubbery of nature is explained in its greatest form. The trees are described as blossoming and blooming, the fig trees are decorated with figs, and winter is over signifying everything coming to life and regaining its former beauty. The theme of nature is continued through with the Gospel (Luke 1:39-45) which mentions Mary's journey to the town of Judah and how she found and saw God during her journey. The Gospel ends with saying that if you do believe in the Lord, what you hear will be fulfilled.

Both the Reading and the Gospel revealed to me the idea that you must not look past signs that pop up in your everyday life and through nature. Parts of nature can be seen at our home and around Central Catholic High School. We become so accustomed to them and do not appreciate it as we should. When beautiful things occur, we should not miss them, but rather find a way to be thankful for them and make a greater meaning come out of it. At Central, we can attempt to not take for granted all the aspects that we, as students and faculty, tend to overlook. We are given beautiful pieces of religious artwork and artifacts such as stained glass, statues, crosses, and more if you take the time to try to seek out to notice them. We are blessed with a chapel on campus and locations around the school, designated specifically for adoration and time to be in the presence of Christ. As a community we should yearn to be more appreciative and grateful for the stunning creations and life God as given each of us.

-Trevor Naman, Class of 2020

## **Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>**

### **Isaiah 7: 10-14 † Psalm 24 † Romans 1: 1-7 † Matthew 1: 18-24**

The world is constantly tempting humans into sin. Because of this, there is a constant barrier in the relationship between humans and God. In Isaiah 7:10-14, it almost seems as though it is going the other way. God is tempting Ahaz. This draws a straight connection to Advent. During this time, we are tempted with the anticipated arrival of Jesus to our world. However, we must be patient and understand that our wait is well worth it. This can also be related to our own faith. We must be patient with God and the relationship that we have with Him. Although the Last Judgement could happen at any moment, we must wait for God to return to our Earth.

In the Catholic faith, everyone is called to be someone or something. In Romans 1:1-7, Paul is called to be an apostle. He is told that he must spread the good news of the Lord. We are also called in the many different aspects of our lives. At Central, the students are called to be men of faith, scholarship, and service. As with any other responsibility, we must fulfill our duty. This is exactly how we should live out our own faith. As Catholics, we are all called to belong to Jesus Christ. We should fulfill the duty that God has given us in that we should want to have a good relationship with him. The best way to do this is through constant prayer. Even if it is a Hail Mary before a test or praying in your head before lunch, we are still drawing closer to God.

We should never doubt the plan that God has written for us. In Matthew 1:18-24, Joseph doubts God's plan for him. He believes that it is best for him to divorce Mary and live his life a different way. However, God brings him back into the relationship through a dream. Joseph now understood that God was sending Jesus to save the world. Joseph found a respect for God that he did not have before. In my own life journey, I have had doubts about God and where he is leading me. Now, I understand that although I do not know the path that he is leading me on, I do know that it is the correct one. This should be an integral belief of everyone that has faith in God. We should want him to lead us in our everyday lives.

-Conor Maddigan, Class of 2020



**Monday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24 † Psalm 25 † Luke 1: 57-66**

Advent is a time of preparation for Christ's coming at Christmas. The first reading and gospel for today talk about God's promise of a prophet to come before our Savior would arrive. This promise is fulfilled by the birth of John the Baptist. He is the one who prepares the way for Christ's ministry on earth. The naming of John the Baptist is the theme of the gospel today. It is an intriguing passage because prior to John's birth, Zechariah, John's father, doubted that John would be born because of Zechariah and Elizabeth's advanced age. The angel Gabriel visited Zechariah and Gabriel said to Zechariah because of his disbelief he would be rendered mute until John was born. As we see in the gospel today that when Zechariah was given the news about the birth of his son they asked what his name would be and Zechariah signaled that the baby's name would be John. Immediately following this announcement Zechariah's tongue was freed by God and he could speak again. Zechariah then is seen speaking blessings of God.

This passage really inspires me because it makes me think of my own life and the many times I have been given signs or directions by God where I did not believe, much like Zechariah. I wonder, why do I doubt? I think part of the answer is, much like Zechariah, I look at my current situation or circumstances and think that there is no way that God wants to use me to bring about His kingdom on earth. I could not be more wrong in this thought. God is always with me and is always looking to bless us with abundance. This is extremely humbling when I think about it. That God loves me so much that he wants to bless my life but also wants me to help in bringing about God's kingdom, not because he needs me to but because His love allows me to participate in it too.

The other part that really sticks out to me in this passage is that it was Zechariah's pride and disbelief to cause him to become mute in the first place. However, he did not allow his brokenness and tribulation to pull himself down deeper instead at the birth of John, Zechariah realized where he was wrong in disbelieving and he immediately turned to God and spoke blessing to Him. This simple action is very profound and is something that I hope to do throughout my whole life that when I slip and fall, I go right back to God and speak of His praises. During this time of Advent let us all think about the blessings that we have in our lives and how blessed we all are for many different reasons. May this awareness help us be drawn closer to God and look to seek Him out in prayer, mass, and the sacraments as we await His coming.

-Kyle Goldcamp, Class of 2004

**Tuesday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**

**2 Samuel 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16 † Psalm 89 † Luke 1: 67-79**

As we near the end the season of Advent we hear the two readings of 2 Samuel and the Gospel according to Luke. A theme that reflects these two readings is this message from God, “The Lord is with you”. Samuel speaks about how in your times of happiness and in your times of trouble the Lord is with you. He then goes on to talk about how God has revealed the house he established for you referring to Heaven.

In our own lives today, how often are we aware that God is with us? Often times we put all of the stress and anxiety on ourselves, we tend to become self-centered and believe that we must do it all on our own. However, God is with us, “I have been with you wherever you went” as Christians we must believe that God is going to save us once again and that should put us at peace. Through God’s saving power we know that all of the troubles we endure here on earth will build us up for the glory we will receive in heaven.

God has gifted us with the tools we need to get to Heaven. Are we using those tools on a daily basis? A role model for these tools is Zechariah, who in Luke (1:20) was silenced for his disbelief in God. However, whenever his power of speech returns, he cries out, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free.” The patience that the Holy Spirit fills within Zechariah is something as Christians we must admire and strive for, he knew that once he was filled with the joy of God things will get better. During the ending of the season of Advent, we shall strive to be as clear sighted as Zechariah to read into the signs of the times. To see and understand the fulfillment of God’s promises.

A perfect way to live out this theme of “The Lord is with you” is partaking in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Having the strength to let God work within your heart to call you by name to follow him is powerful as we go into the season of Christmas. In all of the decisions we make, do we know that God is with us? As I see it, we need to understand more fully the saving powers of God and how as an individual, when am I most vulnerable to not see God and how in those times of trouble I can begin to turn to him.

-Ryan Cooper, Class of 2020

**Thursday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Isaiah 9: 1-6 † Psalm 96 † Titus 2: 11-14 † Luke 2: 1-14**

In Luke 2:1-14, the gospel is talking about the birth of Jesus. He gave a new and a spiritual turn to the lives of men. Luke emphasizes the universal significance of Jesus' birth by the introduction of the emperor Caesar Augustus who calls for the whole world to have a census. The census is put in place to make sure everyone is being taxed which is the reason Mary and Joseph must travel to Bethlehem. "While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son". This verse is saying while Caesar Augustus is putting out a census to get money, to build up his empire, and to take control, Jesus the King is being born in a stable who in the end will grant anyone who follows him the greatest gift of God: Heaven. This shows that patience is key. It took time for Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, it took time for Jesus to be born, and it took time for Jesus to fulfill God's plan. Advent is all about patience for the coming of Christ.

The second part of the gospel talks about the angels coming to spread the news to the shepherds. Shepherds were looked down upon by many. But Jesus came for all people rich and poor, male and female, educated and uneducated. By announcing this to them, God demonstrates his love for all people. The shepherds showed willingness and belief in the angel and in God. They had willing hearts which gave them the ability to see Christ. Whenever there is a heart to believe the truth, there are eyes to see the truth. When we take God at his word, we all have the ability to see what the shepherds saw.

When the Angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in Bethlehem, St. Luke writes: "Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests'." The Gloria that we sing during the Eucharistic celebration recalls the angelic hymn. The hymn is about the praise of the holy night which we are reminded of every Sunday.

The name 'Christmas' comes from the Mass of Christ. Christians remember that Jesus died for us and then came back to life. The 'Christ-Mass' service was the only one that was allowed to take place after sunset, so people had it at midnight. So, we get the name Christ-Mass, shortened to Christmas. Today is Christmas, let us rejoice and celebrate the good news and rejoice just as the angels told the shepherds to do. Jesus is the personification of Divinity. Let us celebrate and reflect all has done for us and never forget this day and meaning. Every Christmas

we celebrate not Caesar's triumphant census, but the coming of Christ and the days leading up to it.

-Vincent Pascoe, Class of 2020