

Friday, December 1, 2017  
Dn 7:2-14; Dn 3:75-81; Lk 21:29-33

Paige Byrne Shortal

*Praise and exalt him above all forever.*

The Canticle of Daniel is a heart-felt, full-throated, joy-filled song of praise. One can feel the elation even when it's read in a monotone — but please don't do that. I'm reminded of a shape note singers gathering — an experience not to be missed. Singers sit in a square as each takes a turn as the leader, announcing the hymn and keeping the beat. What's most noticeable is that everyone participates. Everyone. There are no spectators at a shape note sing and every hymn is sung in four-part harmony at full volume. At a recent sing, after one rousing hymn, one man yelled out, "This is better than Prozac!" Singing, just to praise God, is not something we do often enough. It might be the closest experience of heaven on earth.

*Sing praise with heart and mind and soul — sing praise!*

Saturday, December 2, 2017  
Dn 7:15-27; Dn 3:82-87; Lk 21:34-36

Paige Byrne Shortal

*Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from ... the anxieties of daily life.*

I don't associate anxiety and drowsiness, but it makes sense that our hearts, as the center of compassion, might seem to sleep when we are overwhelmed by life's daily cares. My husband and I had the opportunity to take a vacation involving a couple of flights, negotiating several large cities, and about 1500 miles of train travel. I realized that in the rural Missouri town we call home we rarely think competitively — arriving first, getting good seats, protecting our stuff. But where there are many people who are traveling it's hard not to think, "Me first!" We decided to mindfully avoid seeing others as potential rivals for the goodies of life, and instead, just enjoyed folks and even made a couple of friends.

*God of abundance, calm my anxious heart and teach me that there is always enough.*

Sunday, December 3, 2017  
Daily Bread - December 3, 2017

Mark Bartholomew



"What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'" - *Mark 13:37*

Monday, December 4, 2017

Is 2:1-5; Ps 122:1-9; Mt 8:5-11

Paige Byrne Shortal

*In the days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills.*

Hebrew and Greek both have several words which mean wait. Some are passive, like the English defer, and others are more active, to expect or to look for. In the Hebrew Scriptures, when God's people are waiting for God, it always has an active meaning, full of expectation, anticipation and hope. This reminds us that is not enough to simply wait; one who waits for God must keep the covenant and walk in God's paths, sharing love and seeking justice.

*God of love and hope, we await the Savior's coming with expectation that in that holy birth our lives may be renewed.*

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

Is 11:1-10; Ps 72:1-17; Lk 10:21-24

Paige Byrne Shortal

*There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain.*

The prophet Isaiah gives us a vision of what has been called the peaceful kingdom — a king who will rule with justice and mercy and a world filled with peace and harmony, even among animals who would usually be enemies. The wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox will all live together in a world made new. Children live without fear. There is no violence or hatred. We are called to live out this vision of peace here and now, understanding that Isaiah's vision of God's shalom is the norm for God's creation.

*May our gifts be used to usher in your reign of peace, justice and love.*

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23:1-6; Mt 15:29-37

Paige Byrne Shortal

*Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd."*

Jesus has been busy meeting the various needs of a great crowd of people. Mute people are talking, the blind are able to see, the lame are walking again. After three days of this, instead of taking a break, Jesus expresses his concern for the peoples' lack of food. The disciples are incredulous; feeding such a huge crowd is surely impossible. But where they see obstacles, Jesus sees opportunity — and using what is available, he feeds everyone. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the needs of the world; what could we possibly do to address the vast problems of hunger or poverty? As we prepare for the birth of Jesus, one thing we could do is make sure some of our Christmas giving addresses those difficult issues.

*God-who-comes, stir our hearts to glorify the nativity with acts of compassion and service.*

Thursday, December 7, 2017

Is 26:1-6; Ps 118:1; 8-27; Mt 7:21, 24-27

Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the church

Paige Byrne Shortal

*The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.*

During my years as a pastor, I've been privileged to accompany countless people in times of terrible tragedy, uncertainty, and suffering. Everyone responds differently; some people become angry and bitter, but others seem to have been preparing all their lives to deal with life's difficulties and disappointments. When the floods come, they are able to reach down deep inside and rely on the foundation they've built — a foundation built on worship, prayer and service.

*Guide us as we build a solid foundation, Holy One.*

Friday, December 8, 2017

Gen 3:9-15, 20; Ps 98:1-4; Lk 1:26-38

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Paige Byrne Shortal

*The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth.*

I can only imagine the uproar among the angels when they learned God's plan to go to earth as a baby. There would be no heralding trumpets, no fiery swords, no cosmic battle. Instead, God planned to send Gabriel to a young peasant woman named Mary to tell her she had been chosen for a very special mission. Did the angels try to talk God out of this idea? Did the angels understand God's desire to be with us? Did they comprehend God's deep desire to teach us a new way of living, a way of love and peace? Do we?

*Help us to recognize and receive you as you are, O God: Love incarnate, Emmanuel, God-with-us.*

Saturday, December 9, 2017

Is 30:19-21, 23-26; Ps 147:1-6; Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8

Paige Byrne Shortal

*Then [Jesus] summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness.*

This event from Matthew's Gospel is sometimes referred to as the marching orders for all mission work, all discipleship. The disciples are called, given particular instructions, and sent out to continue Jesus' work. We are those disciples now. If Jesus were sending us out today, as he did the first disciples so many years ago, what might he instruct us to do? The list of needs to be addressed often seems overwhelming, and many times we choose not to do anything because the problems are so huge and so complex. And yet, we are called, given instructions and sent out to preach, to confront evil and injustice, to heal.

*Grant us boldness and confidence to follow where you lead us, Lord Jesus.*

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Daily Bread - December 10, 2017

Mark Bartholomew



A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." - *Mark 1:3*

Monday, December 11, 2017

Is 35:1-10; Ps 85:9-14; Lk 5:17-26

Mary Joshi

*Strengthen hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak.*

Modern technology has brought improvements into our lives, but it has also nurtured a culture in which patience is no longer encouraged. Our world could benefit from the season of Advent now more than ever as it is a time of waiting, anticipating and encouraging patience and perseverance. In Isaiah, the Israelites are urged not to give up hope, to be patient as God will save them from their life of exile and spiritual drought. As they wait, they are asked to support and encourage one another. So too, the paralyzed man and those who carry him to Jesus through the roof are rewarded for their faith and perseverance.

*We wait in blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Tuesday, December 12, 2017  
Zec 2:14-17; Jdt 13:18-19; Lk 1:39-47  
Our Lady of Guadalupe  
Mary Joshi

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.*

Soon after the birth of our daughter, I was overwhelmed by doubt in my ability to be an able parent. What if I made mistakes that would eventually hamper her? Could I safely guide her through that big, scary world out there? My mother assured me that God had embedded amazing instincts within us. "Whatever you do," she advised, "do it with love and ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to guide you through it. You won't go wrong." I wonder: Did Mary and Elizabeth ever worry about their parenting ability? Did God's promise to always be with them calm their fears?

*Blessed are you, O Holy Mother, for your loving faithfulness and trust.*

Wednesday, December 13, 2017  
Is 40:25-31; Ps 103:1-4, 8, 10; Mt 11:28-30  
Lucy, virgin, martyr  
Mary Joshi

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.*

My work as an interpreter in a historical village has influenced my interpretation of this line from Scripture. The village fields were plowed by a friendly pair of oxen for many years. While they both provided strength for the job at hand, when given directions by their handler only one of the oxen, Jack, took the lead and Beau followed in support. When we answer Jesus' call to take his yoke upon our shoulders our problems don't disappear. But we may find that the weight of their burden is eased and made manageable if we allow Jesus to lead us through our turmoil and guide us to a better understanding of God's will.

*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.*

Thursday, December 14, 2017  
Is 41:13-20; Ps 145:1, 9-13; Mt 11:11-15  
John of the Cross, priest, doctor of the church  
Mary Joshi

*The afflicted and needy seek water in vain. I, the Lord, will answer them.*

When John the Baptist called people to repentance, it was to call them to change their lives, to be more in step with God's will. Those who came to be baptized recognized their need for a greater purpose and meaning to their existence. The waters of baptism call us to embrace Christ. Will we allow the water of life to renew tired hearts, refresh our sense of purpose, and give new life to the wastelands within us? Following Christ, rather than the well-worn paths of a secular world, isn't always easy, but it leads us to our truest self.

*Refresh and renew our desire to do your will, O loving God.*

Friday, December 15, 2017  
Is 48:17-19; Ps 1:1-4, 6; Mt 11:16-19

Mary Joshi

*I, the Lord, teach you what is for your good.*

If we were to accept all that modern media would have us believe, our minds would be a muddle of confusion. The “must-haves” of today soon become derided as passé. The latest “cure-alls” become the diseases of tomorrow. Even the latest headline soon becomes tomorrow’s “fake news.” What are we to hold on to? Scripture reminds us that the values of our noisy world can often seem fickle and confusing, so it is helpful to follow the commandments and Jesus’ call to love God and one another. To focus our efforts on these values means we anchor our lives only to God who gives us all that we need.

*Blessed are those who delight in the law of the Lord.*

Saturday, December 16, 2017

Sir 48:1-4, 9-11; Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Mt 17:9a, 10-13

Mary Joshi

*Blessed is he ... who falls asleep in your friendship.*

I found it strange to pray for “the grace of a happy death.” Happy and death didn’t fit together in my mind. Although we know that death is inevitable, when and how it occurs can leave many devastated, angry or unable to find hope in life. After witnessing the death of friends and family who were given time to say goodbye, were at peace with God and those around them, and who felt they had accomplished something of worth in their life, I saw what a gift a “good death” offered those left behind. I now understand how it is the wish of all who must face its inevitable arrival.

*Grant us peace and faith in your mercy and love now and forever.*

Sunday, December 17, 2017

Daily Bread - December 17, 2017

Mark Bartholomew



"Who are you...What do you have to say for yourself?" - *John 1:22*

Monday, December 18, 2017

Jer 23:5-8; Ps 72:1-19; Mt 1:18-25

Miguel Dulick

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David.*  
We have begun the “O Antiphons, the “seven-day” novena, if you will, that closes the Advent season; I conclude the Daily Bread each day this week with its the appointed antiphon. Today we see things from Joseph’s point of view. His silence is golden, as his devotion to Mary saves her from the law that would have stoned her for adultery. You know what? It’s a love story! Really, the story is so simple and sweet and it continues to inspire.

*O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: Come to rescue us with your mighty power!*

Tuesday, December 19, 2017

Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a; Ps 71:3-17; Lk 1:5-25

Miguel Dulick

*Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard.*  
After thousands of years, salvation history is finally picking up speed. John the Baptist — representing the long-anticipated return of Elijah — is on his way! Of course, there are still a few bumps in the road, such as when the angel Gabriel strikes Zechariah dumb for expressing a doubt, one which we’d all share: How does a couple in their nineties have a baby? But how many times have I doubted that God could bring life out of my withering sin? Impossible! I say. Shut your mouth! says the Lord. Like Zechariah, I will again be praising the Lord when God’s promises are fulfilled.

*O Root of Jesse’s stem, sign of God’s love for all people: Come to save us without delay!*

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-6; Lk 1:26-38

Miguel Dulick

*How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?*  
Mary “ever virgin,” expresses her uncertainty with this question. But she did have the baby we’d been waiting for! We had fun in some astonishing college classes on the Trinity at Boston College, where classmates and the professor unwrapped the depths of the question: “Was Jesus a human person?” We picked and we picked till we came up with: “Yes, Jesus was a human person, but the person who was human was the second person of the Trinity!” Mary knew that person, that holy child, because she was willing to say: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” And, her “yes” allows us to know him too.  
*O Key of David, opening the gates of God’s eternal Kingdom: Come and free the prisoners of darkness!*

Thursday, December 21, 2017

Sg 2:8-14; Ps 33:2-21; Lk 1:39-45

Miguel Dulick

*Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

Here it is only four more shopping days until Christmas and Mary is heading for the hills! Any chance we might follow her example? The malls have been “doing” Christmas for months, but the church moves at its own pace. Advent is a time for reflection, preparation, self-awareness, even if we’re already singing carols here and there. I recommend the posadas, our annual nightly visits to the poor in our little town here in Honduras, re-enacting Joseph and Mary’s quest for lodging in Bethlehem. We share and sing and pray for an hour or so, a treasured time of peace and quiet. Join us, at least in spirit!

*O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: Come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

Friday, December 22, 2017

1 Sm 1:24-28; 1 Sm 2-8; Lk 1:46-56

Miguel Dulick

*He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*

A lot of Christmas carols are pretty sentimental. Why aren’t there more songs with lyrics provided by the original caroler, the Virgin Mary herself? A cynic might say she’s plagiarizing the Song of Hannah (used for the responsorial psalm today). But look closely. Mary is a social justice warrior, yes, but her real theme is mercy, a quality unmentioned in her source. So, sure, I’d love to see some fat cats taken down a peg and some humble folks catching a break. But that “mercy” thing, you see, it’s the bottom line. So sing, sing of the Lord who has “mercy in every generation.”

*O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: Come and save us, whom you formed from the dust!*

Saturday, December 23, 2017

Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; Ps 25:4-14; Lk 1:57-66

Miguel Dulick

*When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a son.*

Without Luke’s Gospel, Christmas would be impossible! Luke seems to think the same thing about John the Baptist. Now, is this a flub? “They made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called.” Zechariah is mute, he’s not deaf! But you have to love this story; everyone expects that an only son will receive his father’s name, but there’s another Father involved.

“John” in Hebrew is Yohanan, that is, Yahweh is gracious. So, this is it: one more “hold” till Christmas Eve. I feel as tingly as the attendees at John’s birth: “What, then, will this child be?”

*O Emmanuel, our King and giver of the Law: Come to save us, Lord our God!*

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Daily Bread - December 24, 2017

Mark Bartholomew





"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." - *Luke 1:30*

Monday, December 25, 2017

Is 62:11-12; Ps 97; Ti 3; Lk 2:15-20

The Nativity of The Lord - Mass At Dawn

Patricia Russell

*... not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy ...*

The loving Father longs to save us. When sin destroyed our communion with him, he planned his church to gather and dwell with him in heaven. God didn't view humankind as irrevocably lost to sin; rather, he called all people to live in a special relationship with him through Jesus Christ, his Son — an extraordinary gesture of love and compassion. It's the perfect gift; we should treasure it every day. May the spirit of this glorious season of giving inspire us daily to extravagantly offer love and mercy, not because others earn it, but because we are all heirs in the hope of eternal life.

*Loving Father, on this Christmas morning, we rejoice in the priceless gift of your Son.*

Tuesday, December 26, 2017

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Ps 31; Mt 10:17-22

Stephen, first martyr

Patricia Russell

*"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

The Spirit guides Stephen to perform great works that infuriate his opponents. They fail to counter the wisdom and the spirit of his signs, so they stone him. Stephen persists and offers his spirit to the Lord. These varying uses of the word "spirit" echo Christ's own sacrifice and the significance of the promise of an advocate. After giving up his own spirit — his physical being — Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit — the Advocate — to remain with the disciples and give them a spirit of boldness to spread the good news. The Spirit empowers and commissions Stephen; he cannot help but give testimony, even at the risk of his own earthly life. Stephen courageously offers his temporal spirit as witness to power of the Holy Spirit.

*Holy Spirit, dwell within us that we may be courageous and steadfast.*

Wednesday, December 27, 2017

1 Jn 1:1-4; Ps 97; Jn 20: 1a; 2-8

John, apostle, evangelist  
Patricia Russell

*... for the life was made visible ...*

The Father sends his Son, Jesus Christ to lead us to the mystery of the gift of eternal life — the visible image of an invisible God. Interacting with Jesus, the apostles intimately encounter the incarnation. We look upon their experiences with the eyes of faith because their witness expresses Jesus, their friend and teacher, not only as fully human but as divine. Their testimony allows us to understand the spiritual reality of the word made flesh. The complex reality of the coming together of human and divine is made clear in their coming to recognize Jesus as the bearer of divine life.

*Open our eyes, Lord, to see you in all things.*

Thursday, December 28, 2017

1 Jn 1:5—2:2; Ps 124; Mt 2:13-18

Holy Innocents, martyrs

Patricia Russell

*“Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt.”*

The angel of the Lord prompted Joseph to gather Mary and Jesus and flee a power-mad ruler slaughtering vulnerable children. Imagine Joseph’s fear and urgency to protect his family. Their only option is to leave everything behind, not knowing how long they will be gone or even if they will return. The one certainty is that anywhere is better than the terror at home. It’s absurd to think that refugees arbitrarily pack up and set out. Like Joseph, they fear for their family’s safety. Their blind exodus is their only hope to find comfort and security.

*All knowing God, help us to see the plight of the holy family in today’s refugees.*

Friday, December 29, 2017

1 Jn 2:3-11; Ps 96; Lk 2:22-35

Patricia Russell

*Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness.*

Reports of hate crimes fill the news. Swastikas, racist taunts and acts of violence abound.

Attacks against Muslims increased sharply within the last year with anti-Jewish acts and hate crimes against many other minorities increasing as well. Fear, hardship, entitlement and lack of understanding fuel conditions that perpetuate injustice. Groups spewing hateful rhetoric, harassment and intimidation are on the rise, along with bitter xenophobia, misogyny, classism, racism and other arbitrary divisions that encourage violence. We must shine brightly to combat the darkness of evil that fuels hatred and intolerance.

*God of light, make us beacons of your love.*

Saturday, December 30, 2017

1 Jn 2:12-17; Ps 96; Lk 2:36-40

Patricia Russell

*Do not love the world or the things of the world.*

The Christmas presents may still be under the tree. There's joy in giving and receiving, but we cannot get so caught up in material possessions that we forget it is all temporary. Nothing we buy, no matter its quality, lasts forever. Things break. There are expiration dates, limited warranties. Technology becomes obsolete. Functioning in the modern world necessitates having certain possessions, but today's readings warn of "a pretentious life." Chasing after earthly things becomes an endless quest for bigger, better, newer versions, which inevitably leads to disappointment. We can't fill with stuff the space that only God should occupy. His loving gift of mercy and salvation is the only thing that lasts forever.

*Help us, God of abundance, to develop a healthy awareness of our selfish wants and our actual needs.*

Sunday, December 31, 2017

Daily Bread - December 31, 2017

Holy Family

Mark Bartholomew



"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples." - *Luke 2:29-30*