Going Beneath the Surface:
A Closer Walk with the Four Sundays of Advent

Reflections written by
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Hope

Author’s Note

I have many hopes for this little journal. I hope that you, dear reader, find it of practical use during this Advent season. I hope you find inspiration, rest and encouragement within its brief pages. I hope that by looking closely at the Sunday readings throughout the week you are able to dig more deeply into their wisdom and message. I hope that within that wisdom and message you discover God’s Word being written in your heart in a new way, bringing you into closer intimacy with Jesus. Finally, I hope this journal is a source of light for you during this Advent season. In the swirl of ornaments, parties, presents, snow or no snow, joys and sorrows, may this journal become a steady place. May it draw you gently back to the truth of the season, the peace and joy of Christ being born for all of us.
How to use this journal

The point of this journal is to help you, the reader, enter more deeply into the Sunday readings for the four Sundays of Advent. Each week begins on Monday, looking forward to the following Sunday. This means your journal actually starts before Advent begins. So, you'll want to mark in your calendar, make a reminder on your phone or a post-it note at work to start this journal on **Monday, November 26, 2018**.

Each day here is space for notes, connections or questions you have about the reading as well as space for any reactions or inspiration you have after spending time with reading. How is God speaking to you through this passage? What did you learn about, or what confused you?

The journal is laid out as follows:

- **Monday**: Read and reflect on the First Reading
- **Tuesday**: Read and reflect on the Psalm
- **Wednesday**: Read and reflect on the Second Reading
- **Thursday**: Read and reflect on the Gospel
- **Friday**: Connecting the readings
- **Saturday**: Theme for the coming week
- **Sunday**: Space for additional journaling and homily notes that enhance your understanding of the readings

Fridays and Saturdays are special days. On Fridays, I have prayerfully offered a few connections that are found between the First Reading, Psalm and Gospel in a special way. The Second Reading also plays a part, but there is a unique connection between the other three readings. As I explain in the connections, the Psalm is specifically chosen to be the key or lens to unlocking the First Reading to shed light on the Gospel. This is true every single Sunday of the liturgical year.

On Saturdays, I have offered an additional reflection on how to apply these readings to our daily lives, especially during the Advent season. There you will find a theme for the coming week, ideas for how to better live the theme and space to write your commitments you wish to fulfill (spiritual ones, not for holiday parties or baking lists).
Monday: First Reading from Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”
Tuesday: Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

R. (1b) **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; 
teach me your paths, 
Guide me in your truth and teach me, 
for you are God my savior, 
and for you I wait all the day.

R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**
Good and upright is the LORD; 
thus he shows sinners the way. 
He guides the humble to justice, 
and teaches the humble his way.

R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**
All the paths of the LORD are kindness 
and constancy toward those who keep 
his covenant and his decrees. 
The friendship of the LORD is with 
those who fear him, and his covenant, 
for their instruction.

R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**
Brothers and sisters:

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Reflect and Pray

Notes, thoughts or questions:

Jesus said to his disciples:

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”
Friday: Connecting the Readings

This first Sunday of Advent we hear from the prophet Jeremiah, prophesying about the coming of the Messiah. He tells the people that in this time Judah and Jerusalem will be safe, dwelling secure under the reign of this righteous ruler. Then, Jesus describes the end times in the Gospel of Luke. His depiction is not as picturesque as Jeremiah’s. Jesus tells his followers that when the Son of Man comes, people will be frightened, there will be distress and dismay, and the whole world will be shaken. The Psalm gives us the key to see into Jesus’ words. “To you O Lord I lift up my soul.” Also in the Gospel, Jesus encourages his followers not to loose heart, but to “Stand erect and raise your heads.” No matter what may come, we are called to lift our hearts and minds to always gaze upon Christ. Jesus calls for us to be vigilant, for the turbulence of the world can easily distract us.

Although we tend to think about saints as holy and pious, and picture them with halos above their heads and ecstatic gazes, true saints are much more accessible. They are men and women like us, who live ordinary lives and struggle with ordinary problems. What makes them saints is their clear and unwavering focus on God and God’s people...The saints are our brothers and sisters, calling us to become like them.—Henri Nouwen

Reflect and Pray
Saturday: Theme for the Week: Focus on God

There are natural rhythms and cycles to the year. Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. The school year. The liturgical year, which begins with Advent. As we embark on a new liturgical year, let’s spend this week considering how we are keeping our lives fixed on Christ. Some questions to reflect upon:

Does my schedule (and my family’s schedule) encourage us to spend time each day in prayer?

Have I been to Reconciliation in the past 6 months?

What kinds of books am I reading, or television am I watching? Are they cultivating a pure heart within me?

Do I find myself grateful at the end of the day, or do I hold onto any negative moments of the day?

*Consider adding your own questions as you think about one or two ways you would like to increase your focus on God*

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**Commitment(s) for the Week:**

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**Reflect and Pray**

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Monday: First Reading from Baruch 5:1-9

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God’s worship.

Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.

The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God’s command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company.

Word of Life

Reflect and Pray
Tuesday: Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R. (3) **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**
When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.
R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**
Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.
R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**
Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.
R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**
Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.
R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Reflect and Pray
Brothers and sisters:
I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.
Thursday: Gospel according to Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.

John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Reflect and Pray
Friday: Connecting the Readings

How many times have we heard these readings? Prepare the way of the Lord! Yes, yes, we know already, isn’t the way prepared yet?! But if we pause and consider the theme carrying us from last week to this week, we know that there is still much work to be done. How often we stumble and fall, or even stray, from the path we are to be preparing. Both the First Reading and the Gospel announcing the coming of the Lord. Make ready, get moving, see the wonders that will be wrought in the days ahead! It is intimidating. How can I prepare the way for God? What can I do, I’m just one person? We’ve had a long time, isn’t everything ready already? I’m ok, you’re ok, it’ll all be ok, right?

The last time we heard these readings during Advent, Pope Francis said, “We must convert: from the supposition that, all things considered, things are fine as they are and we don’t need any kind of conversion.” The Psalm says it all, “The Lord has done great things for us, we are filled with joy.” Each and every day, God is doing miraculous things in our lives. Each and every day we have the opportunity to respond to this generous love.

Advent is a time when we look forward to the coming of Christ, both as a baby at Christmas but also in His second coming as King of Kings. Jesus is coming for us, what incredible news! The challenge is to not let this message grow stale. Let St. Philip Neri encourage you:

"The true way to advance in holy virtues, is to persevere in a holy cheerfulness."

Reflect and Pray
Preparing for the Second Sunday of Advent

December 9, 2018

Saturday: Theme for the Week: Cheerful Detachment

Are you already filling with stress over the coming holidays? Have you already attended one too many festive gatherings, work parties, cooking decorating playgroups and feel sick at the sight of candy canes and ornaments? If you are feeling any of this, or find yourself heading down that road, use this week to pause. Consider doing one or more of the following to reconnect with the hope of Advent, rather than wallowing in false joy.

Make the effort to go to daily Mass or take time for a Holy Hour of Adoration

If you didn't last week, or even if you did but already find yourself in need of healing grace, go to Reconciliation.

Go out of your way to serve someone—make a meal, bake some cookies, offer to help hang holiday lights or decorations. And be sure to do it with an attitude of cheerfulness.

As you go about your day, especially while shopping, let others go first. With a smile on your face and peace, rather than anxiety, in your heart. Be aware of your reactions to others and look deeply to see Christ in each person you encounter, regardless of how Christ-like they are acting in the moment.

Reflect and Pray
Preparing for the Second Sunday of Advent
December 9, 2018

Homily Notes
Monday: First Reading from Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Word of Life

Reflect and Pray

Notes, thoughts or questions:
Tuesday: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

R. (6) **Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**
God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid.
My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation.

R. **Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name; among the nations make known his deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name.

R. **Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement; let this be known throughout all the earth.
Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!

R. **Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**

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**Reflect and Pray**

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Brothers and sisters:
Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again: rejoice!
Your kindness should be known to all.
The Lord is near.
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all
understanding will guard your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus.
Thursday: Gospel according to Luke 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist, “What should we do?” He said to them in reply, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He answered them, “Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.” Soldiers also asked him, “And what is it that we should do?” He told them, “Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Reflect and Pray

Notes, thoughts or questions:
Friday: Connecting the Readings

We are told no less than 8 times in the readings to be full of joy, or to rejoice. The first 3 readings all exhort us to pause and look about us. The Lord is with us, how could we be anything but joyful? Yet our Gospel reading tempers our spirits a bit, for we are like those walking with John the Baptist. Is the Savior here, or will we find fulfillment over there? Should we reach for the next best thing, hoping it will satisfy our need for love and encouragement? Again, the Psalm is our key which highlights the Old Testament reading and informs our understanding of the Gospel. In the Gospel, the people were looking to John to be the Savior. But John, in his unique and vivid imagery, tells the people in no uncertain terms that the Christ is still coming. While holding that anticipation close to our hearts, we are able to still rejoice with the psalmist and the prophet Zephaniah, Jesus is here! Every Sunday of Advent we find the meeting of these two dynamic postures. We celebrate Jesus’ presence with us in the Word, the People, the Priest and the Eucharist. But we also light the Advent candle, and sing songs like “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Yes, Jesus is with us. But Jesus is also still on His way. We need to find a way to live in the spirit of St. Paul, who had seen Christ but was still proclaimed, truthfully, that Jesus is still coming. And this, this is the source of our joy. Jesus with us, Jesus coming to us.

“The time of Advent...returns us to the horizon of hope, a hope that does not disappoint because it is founded on the Word of God. A hope that does not disappoint, simply because the Lord never disap-

Reflect and Pray
Saturday: Theme for the Week: Jesus in the Midst

Last week one of the challenges was to look for Christ in each person we met. This week, let’s take it one step further—seeking unity. There is a movement in the Church called The Focolare, founded by Chiara Lubich in the aftermath of World War II. One of the primary insights God graced Chiara with was into Jesus’ prayer the night before He died, “Father, may they all be one.” (Jn 17:21) In this intense moment, Jesus wished for our unity. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Chiara and her companions took this wish for unity and found it put into practice in Jesus’ instruction that “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Mt 18:20) When we gather with others, be it at work, at a playgroup, at Mass or simply around our dinner table, we have an opportunity to bring Jesus into the midst of you. Jesus in the midst means mutual love, sacrificial love, trust, hope, forgiveness, and common ground. This week, how can you make yourself more open to experiencing Jesus in the midst? Quicker to listen. Slower to anger. Increase patience. Greater generosity. Free with forgiveness.

Commitment(s) for the Week:

Reflect and Pray
Monday: First Reading from Micah 5:1-4A

Thus says the LORD:
You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel.

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.
Tuesday: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R. (4) **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**
O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power, and come to save us.

R. **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

R. **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

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**Reflect and Pray**
Brothers and sisters:
When Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; in holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"

First he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in." These are offered according to the law. Then he says, :Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first to establish the second. By this "will," we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
Thursday: Gospel according to Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflect and Pray
Friday: Connecting the Readings

This week has probably been busy, full of last minute preparations. Our readings this Sunday should cause us to pause and consider just what, or who, we are preparing for. Are we preparing for a day, or a person? In the first reading, Michah describes the one to be borne who will bring Israel home. Who is this one? The Psalm response cries out for our return home, which we are able to do by seeing the Lord’s face. Could God truly be the One, not just a mighty ruler, righteous leader or wise prophet? Yes! Elizabeth confirms it for us with wonder and humility, “And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?...Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Elizabeth boldly blesses Mary. Mary’s example of trust is a lesson for all of us to take to heart. Advent is a time set apart to prepare for Christ, not just as a baby but also in His second coming. Do we trust that He will return? Do we even believe He will return? Jesus said, “So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Mt 24:44). How are we ordering our life so that when Jesus does come, He blesses us with the same words Elizabeth blessed Mary with?

*From Mary we learn to surrender to God’s Will in all things. From Mary we learn to trust even when all hope seems gone. From Mary we learn to love Christ her Son and the Son of God!*

*Pope John Paul II*

Reflect and Pray

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Notes, thoughts or questions:
Where did you discover Jesus in the midst last week? Hopefully you have found yourself more open to others and more receptive to Jesus living within them. For this coming week, which you can and should stretch beyond Christmas Day, take some quiet time to be with the Holy Spirit. Often forgotten about, the Holy Spirit is one of the major players in the Advent experience. After all, it is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus is conceived within Mary. Incredibly, the Holy Spirit wishes to confer a similar grace upon each of us. Jesus desires to be born in each of our hearts. We have to learn from Mary to become “little Marys.” We follow her in joyful haste to share Christ born within us to everyone we meet. Consider saying one of these two prayers daily to help prepare your heart for the miraculous birth of Christ, both in our world and in your heart.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.”

- St. Patrick

Reflect and Pray
Preparing for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 23, 2018

Homily Notes
If you enjoyed this journal, I would love to hear from you. If you have suggestions for Lent or next Advent, I would love to hear those as well. You can find me at dailygraces.net, on Facebook at Daily Graces, Twitter @KateTaliaferro and on Instagram at Kate Taliaferro.

*May your hearts and homes be blessed this Advent Season, and may our Lord, Jesus Christ, come to reign in both.*