

# To be Clay in His Hands

Advent Reflections for 2020



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## Author's Note and Introduction

These yearly Advent Journals hold a special place in my heart. Each year I am striving to stretch myself, my understanding Scripture and of the season. Not one who wants to do the same thing twice, this year continues to evolve from previous years' journals.

This year, while not specifically a guided *Lectio Divina* experience, is loosely based on the practice. Each week centers around the Sunday readings for each of the 4 weeks of Advent. The daily meditations spring from specific Scripture references found within the Sunday readings.

As I read, prayed and reflected on these 4 Sundays, the image of the Potter continued to resonate with me. God, our loving creator, has not made us like clockwork toys, ready to be wound up and set off on our merry way. God is actively engaged in every step of our formation as persons, guiding us along the path to holiness. The hands of a potter gently shaping the clay into a beautiful vessel. You will see this theme be mentioned again and again throughout this meditation journal. I hope it resonates with you as much as it has with me.

May God bless you and keep you always, especially during this Advent season.

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November 29, 2020

## How to Use this Journal

While this journal was originally written with the individual in mind, it does not need to be limited to personal reflection. Here are a few ideas for other ways to utilize this resource

**Small Group:** Bearing in mind the permissions listed at the start of this journal, a small group could meet weekly to pray through the previous Sunday's readings together. They could discuss the daily reflections which were especially impactful, work together to discover answers for the reflection questions, and broaden their understanding of themselves, their relationship with God and what God is speaking to them through the Scriptures.

**As a Family:** These reflections are family friendly and would provide an opportunity for meaningful connection between family members - spouses, parents and adult children living at home, parents and teenagers or even middle school age children.

**One-on-One:** This journal could be used by two people as part of a spiritual accountability and accompaniment relationship. Perhaps you have a friend or loved who you would like to grow closer to. A simple daily text message or phone call about the reflection for the day could bring the two of you closer together, even if you are not co-located or are not able to be together during this Advent season. This would be especially beautiful to share with someone who has suffered through periods of isolation due to the pandemic.

## A Place of Fullness

*So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:7)*

We often feel empty, as if we have not been given the tools we need to accomplish the grand task of living life. We tell ourselves we are not enough, we don't have enough, somewhere along the way we were shorted on some necessity which would make our present circumstance more workable. But St. Paul tells us this is a falsehood. In Christ, we have been given every spiritual gift necessary as we await the second coming of our Savior. As Christians, we take the long view. Advent is an opportunity to step back from the immediacy of daily life in order to look ahead to our heavenly desires.

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*What gifts have you been given this year? Where do you feel like you are in need of support or encouragement?*


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November 30, 2020

## Out of Love

*Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways,  
and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? (Is 63:17)*

Our places of emptiness often coincide with our tendencies toward wandering. We are not alone in this. The prophet Isaiah lamented the Israelite's wandering ways with as much frustration as we do today. Why do we wander?! We wander because while we were created good, we are also born inclined to sin. And God, in His infinite love and mercy, gives us the freedom to willingly choose to love Him in return. He does not require it, He does not exact payment for all He has given us. He hopes against hope that we will not wander far, always calling us back to His loving embrace.

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*Where have you been wandering? How is God calling you back this  
Advent season?*


December 1, 2020

## Mindfulness

*Would that you might meet us doing right,  
that we might be mindful of you in our ways! (Is 64:4)*

There is a growing emphasis on the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is disciplining your thoughts to focus on the present moment while acknowledging feelings and emotions without fixating on them. Instead of getting wrapped up in anxieties for the future or concerns that are past, you intentionally stay open to what is happening in the here and now. The prophet Isaiah, a man ahead of his time, is calling us to practice mindfulness, but with a unique twist. Instead of concerning ourselves with *our* present moment, we ought to be concerning ourselves with *God's* present moment. What is God speaking to us in this time, in this place, in this person?

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*What is God speaking to you today? In this moment?*


December 2, 2020

## Watch!

*Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. (Mark 13:35)*

The more we practice listening to God, the better we will become at discerning the movements of the Spirit within us. But, as Jesus warns, we will never know for certain what the day of the Lord will bring us. We must always be ready for a new direction, a new inspiration or a new way forward. God's ways are not our ways. We do not know the hearts and minds of those whom God calls us to serve. We are called to follow our own vocation, our own calling in God's plan for humanity. While we cannot see the grand design, when we follow where we are called we sometimes glimpse a flash of

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the brilliance waiting for us in heaven. But only if we watch well!  
*How has God called you this year? Where is He calling you this Advent season?*

December 3, 2020

## Call and Response

*Give us new life, and we will call upon your name. (Psalms 80:19)*

When we hear the voice of God working in our life, there are two appropriate reactions which cannot be separated. Prayer and action. We are being called to something. That something requires our action, our activity, our response. At the same time, we call back to God in prayer. Perhaps we are joyful in our new activity, perhaps nervous or unsure. Whatever our emotion, we can bring it to God in prayer. The more we listen to God's call, the more we will respond to Him and the closer we will become. It is a circle, an ever tightening spiral.

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*Is there a situation that is awaiting your response to God's call? Take some time to ponder what prayer and action God is waiting for you to take.*

December 4, 2020

## To Each His Own

*It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. (Mark 13:34)*

We are each called to our own work while we await Jesus' coming. We have to maintain a split focus, one part of us in the here and now of daily life, but the other always keeping watch on the heavenly things. What we do today will impact our eternal life. Our knowledge and understanding of eternal life will greatly influence how we choose to spend our days on earth. Each of us in on our own unique path to heaven. No two of us have been called to live the same life. Even the saints, while incredible role models of faith, were not all called to the same holiness, skills or even knowledge. But though we have our separate journeys, our end is all the same. And Jesus, who is both Human and Divine, walks with each of us, no matter how many twists and turns the road may have.

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*What makes your journey with Christ unique? Where do you hope to travel in this Advent season?*

December 5, 2020

## The Potter

*Yet, LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:7)*

At the end of it all, we have to understand that God is God and we are not. It takes a very bold person to utter these words with confidence. It takes an even bolder, and humbler, person, to live by them. Mary shines forth as the ultimate example of what this looks like. Mary's *fiat*, her "Yes" to God's invitation to participate in the greatest miracle since creation itself, did not come with hesitation, pride, or anxiety. Mary said yes with her whole self, giving her life over to God's plan for her. Mary allowed herself to remain soft in the Potter's hands, moldable and easy to form. She let herself be built up, adorned with the heavenly crown of *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. But she also did not hesitate to let herself be chipped away at, to be bent and in some places broken, as the Seven Sorrows pierced her heart. Mary held nothing back. Instead of remaining empty, she

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found herself filled beyond measure with God's love, and His Son. *During this Advent, consider praying Mary's fiat daily. Where do you need to soften yourself so God can work His wonders in your life? "Be it done unto me according to your will."*

December 6, 2020

## The One

*One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:7-8)*

There is a fascination, tied most likely to our inclination toward the vice of pride, with being “The One.” There can only be one winner - as every reality competition show on TV reminds us. There can only be one winner of the Super Bowl or World Series every year. The people looked to John the Baptist, wondering if he was The One promised - the Messiah. John, rather than claiming what authority he did have as a prophet, puffing up his own importance, deflects these inquires. With a humbleness not commonly found in today’s spotlight, he points to Jesus, the true One.

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*How and where are you tempted to bolster your own importance - at work, within your family, church or social circles? Does it come at the expense of others?*

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December 7, 2020

## Herald

*Cry out, do not fear!  
Say to the cities of Judah:  
Here is your God! (Isaiah 40:9b)*

When is the last time you shared the Good News of Jesus? How often do you speak of God and Godly things with friends, neighbors, family, or even strangers? There is an oft used phrase, “Actions speak louder than words.” And another, usually attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” The spirit of both of these phrases is very well and good. Our actions should demonstrate what we believe, what we value, the standards we have chosen to keep. However, our words are also necessary. Jesus did not live an excellent life silently. He boldly proclaimed the Kingdom of God throughout His ministry, even in His dying moments. Live the Gospel - yes! Speak the Gospel - yes!

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*Does sharing your faith with others make you feel uncomfortable? Challenge yourself this week, to share a piece of your faith with another person. Use this space to make a plan, or reflect on the experience.*

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December 8, 2020

## Reflection

*Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. (2 Peter 3:14)*

Today we celebrate the Immaculate Conception - the incredible moment when Mary came into the world without the stain of Original Sin. Mary is a profound character in our religious tradition. She holds so much in tension within her very person. Mary was saved from Original Sin so that she could become the mother of Jesus, before He entered the world as a human. She experienced the reality of salvation before it historically occurred in Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection. She also shows us how to find peace in the middle of of the present and future. From the moment of the Annunciation, she no longer had to wait for the Savior to arrive, but she did not fully understand how Jesus would be the Savior. She had to still wait. But she did not wait with anxiety. She pondered and reflected about what had been revealed, holding it all close to her heart.

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*How can you emulate Mary's pondering posture, reflecting rather than worrying about what has not yet been revealed.*

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December 9, 2020

## Patience

*The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)*

God is so patient with us. We, however, are rarely patient with God. And yet we all know that good things come to those who wait, that hard work takes time to yield results. We are willing to plant seeds, tend sprouts, water and weed in the summer sun in the hopes of a few ripe tomatoes. We will pay extra for items made by hand, carefully crafted to be one of a kind. But with God, it's now or nothing. We forget that God is operating on a different timeline than ours, outside of time entirely in fact! We are the clay, not the potter. We cannot see how adding more clay in this moment might ruin the masterpiece, or how carving this section away could endanger the integrity of the piece. To trust in God's timing means to let go of our own. To be willing to wait in the tension of present and future, as Mary did.

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*Where are you feeling most impatient this Advent season? What do you need to turn over in trust to God's timing?*

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The Second Saturday of Advent  
The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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December 12, 2020

## Trust

*Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;  
in his arms he gathers the lambs (Isaiah 40:11)*

Building a Kingdom is hard work. Rome wasn't built in a day, and the work set before us won't be finished by this evening. A little like a grocery list, we feel like we cannot grasp the full scope of the project. There's always something that got left behind, or a new request waiting for us when we get home. When Mary appeared to Juan Diego, she did not tell him to talk to the bishop and then leave him to his own devices. She continued to talk with him, to help and assist him. It is through her intervention that the chapel was built and the faith was kindled in the hearts of the Mexican people. God does not set us on a task and then walk away. He is not a clockmaker, winding the gears into place and letting it work according to its own devices. He gathers us in His arms, walking with us every step of the way.

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*Can you be more trusting of God's presence in your life? Where do you feel like you are lacking in this trust?*

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The Third Sunday of Advent

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December 13, 2020

## Dedication

*"I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert,  
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" (John 1:23)*

John the Baptist had every opportunity to draw attention to himself for the sake of his own ego and importance. As common as this is today, it was the same in the time of Jesus. Yet at every opportunity, John deflected the attention away from himself and directed it to the one yet to come. John calls loudly, he does draw attention. But as soon as he has you in his presence, he asks you to seek another. Hear what he has to say, look where he wants you to look. Even in the midst of the Advent color and early Christmas spectacle, this is a desert time. We are being called to both be a John, and also heed John's message. We cry out the need for change in our world, for forgiveness for our faults, for our collective need Savior. We also look inward, recognizing the places we have failed, the places we need to reform and grow. This work is hard. It requires a firmness of mind and stoutness of heart. John the Baptist shows us the way.

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*What part of John the Baptist's story resonates most with you? How can his life inspire you this week?*

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December 14, 2020

## Greatness

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior. (Luke 1:46b-47)*

Mary's words reflect just how great her soul is. These are the first words of her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) which she utters after the Angel Gabriel tells her of her son and Savior. She did not twirl around and glory in her own greatness at being chosen. She did not run to her friends and neighbors, rejoicing in her own good fortune. The first thing she did was take what praise and honor had been bestowed upon her and to focus it straight back to the One who gave it to her. Mary is great - she is the Queen of Heaven. Her greatness lies in her willingness to reflect her own greatness back to God. Mary shows us how to do all things for God's glory. She recognizes that all she has is a gift from God. She rejoices in the gift, and opens herself up to God's purpose and will for those gifts.

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*How can you live today for God's glory, rather than your own?*


December 15, 2020

## Weakness

*He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted,  
to bind up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1)*

Isaiah is speaking of the Messiah, the one who will right all the wrongs and bring justice for the people. This news isn't taken to the kings, courts, or leaders. No, it is given to the broken, the afflicted, the captives, even prisoners. Those who are weak are given the good news. Throughout history, the weak have not been celebrated. We have talked more than once about the human tendency toward pride, puffing up ones ego and position. But we know Jesus came not for the proud, but for the weak. He came for the broken, not the facade of the one who holds it all together. In order to be saved, we must first take ownership of our weaknesses and faults. Only when we recognize we need saving can we be truly saved.

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*Taking honest stock of yourself, what are your 3 biggest weaknesses?*


December 16, 2020

## Gift

*The hungry he has filled with good things;  
the rich he has sent away empty. (Luke 1:53)*

When we honestly face our weakness, it can leave us feeling empty, broken and unwanted. These thoughts couldn't lead us farther from the truth. While there is truth in our weakness, it is not the fullness of the truth. Jesus came to save the weak, which means He came to save us. In her *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims how God has raised up the lowly, He fills the hungry with good things which nourish their body and soul. Those who already have had their fill, those who do not recognize their need, they don't open their hands to receive what is being offered. At every moment, God is waiting for us to realize how much we need Him, so that He can fill us up with everything we need.

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*How do you need God to fill you today? Where do you feel weak and in need of His strength?*

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December 17, 2020

## What is Good

*Test everything; retain what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)*

In the previous weeks of Advent, a common theme was watchfulness - be alert, be ready, you do not know the time or the hour of the Lord's coming. Jesus exhorted His followers not to sleep the days away but to be actively striving for holiness in each moment. From this perspective, St. Paul's teaching fits beautifully into this larger Advent theme. Advent is a time where we can test our habits, our routines, our thoughts. What is bringing us closer to holiness? What is holding us back? Are we open to God's gifts and plans, as John the Baptist and Mary were? Do our hands stay open, freely allowing God to move within our life, or do we hold ourselves closed, afraid of what might happen? Take this time to test yourself. Celebrate what is good, transform what is lacking.

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*What is one habit you are proud of that you've cultivated this year?  
What is one habit you would like to see flourish in this new Church year?*

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December 18, 2020

## Abundance

*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation,  
and wrapped me in a robe of justice (Isaiah 61:10)*

God gives in abundance. From the very beginning of creation, God has been lavish in His treatment of His creatures. Time and again, the Jewish people turned from God. Each time, without fail, God extended Himself toward them, sought them out, saved them in times of distress and continued His blessings upon them. Time and again, He does the same for us today. By becoming human in the womb of Mary, living, breathing and dying, Jesus didn't just save us for eternity. He fundamentally changed who we are. Because He is God's Son we also become God's sons and daughters. We are sons and daughters of the King, clothed as Isaiah says in salvation and justice.

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*Where is God working abundantly in your life? If this is hard to see, begin a blessings journal or list as you reflect on the ways God has loved you this year.*


December 19, 2020

## Perspective

*My spirit rejoices in God my savior. (Luke 1:47)*

So much of life comes down to perspective. Is the glass half empty or half full? As we finish this week, let's look once more at Mary's *Magnificat*. Mary decisively and deliberately adopts a perspective of rejoicing, praise and thanksgiving. Her life has just been completely turned upside down, her life is in real danger, yet she doesn't cower in fear. Her immense trust in and love for God shines forth in this hymn and is an example for each one of us. She trusted in the plan God had, even though she could not see how it would work out. She rested in the Father's hands, allowing Him to mold and shape her according to His designs. God's plan for Mary's role in salvation history was beyond anything any human could have imagined. While each of us isn't called to carry Jesus in our womb, we are called to carry Jesus within us, bringing Him into the world each and every day.

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*How do you bring Jesus forth into the world?*


December 20, 2020

## God's Handiwork

*It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. (2 Samuel 7:8)*

So much of Advent is about fulfilling what has been promised. In this final week of Advent we discover a whole host of promises God has made. The First Reading is a litany of promises God has both fulfilled and continues to make to King David. God recounts how he brought David from the pastures and made him the king of the nation, conquering enemies left and right, securing David's reign. By trusting God, David went from the youngest son to the king of the Chosen people. David probably had dreams of greatness. We all do. But king, a fun daydream surely but so far out of reach to be seriously considered. Only in the hands of the Father, the master potter could the clay of David's life become such a grand design.

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*As this Advent season draws to a close, what promises has God fulfilled for you? Where have you felt God walking most closely with you?*

December 21, 2020

## Plans

*He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever. (Luke 1:32-33a)*

It feels so good when a plan comes together and plays out as you hoped. Perhaps a party, or important meeting, maybe a family vacation. We all have plans, grand and small. But none of us can possibly conceive just how grand the grandest plan of all is - the plan of salvation. God was preparing the world for Jesus when Adam and Eve were sent away from the Garden of Eden. In the angel's words to Mary, we hear how God had been growing His plan through the Chosen People. The people have not been perfect - Jacob stole his brother's birthright, David was an adulterer. Thank goodness God's plans are not reliant on our following them 100% of the time! As this calendar year comes to a close, I'm sure not all of your plans have gone exactly to plan. That doesn't mean they were a waste or a lost cause. God is still at work, nothing can stop His plans.

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*What are some hopes and dreams you have for the coming year?*

December 22, 2020

## Covenant

*I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant (Psalm 89:4)*

God's plans, while incredibly fluid and flexible due to our uncertain ways, will always come to fruition. In fact, God's plans are so certain that He swore covenants with His people, guaranteeing that they would come true. A covenant is more than a promise, it's more than an agreement or contract. A contract is an exchange of goods - you pay me this and I will give you that. In a covenant, not only are the parties swearing a sacred oath, they are exchanging persons - I belong to you and you belong to me. Stop and think about that. By entering into a covenant, God was binding Himself to His creatures. He became their Father, and they were raised up to sons and daughters. The first covenant was with Adam and Eve. God swore subsequent covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. With Jesus, the final and everlasting covenant, all the previous covenants are fulfilled. All of the promises come true in Jesus.

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*Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, fulfills every promise.  
Today, rejoice in your relationship with God, which was born at your  
baptism. You are a child of God.*

December 23, 2020

## Beyond Compare

*"Go, tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD:  
Should you build me a house to dwell in?' (2 Samuel 7:5)*

At the start of the First Reading, we hear of David's desire to build God a Temple. Up until this point, David had been a warrior king, going out and doing battle with the nations surrounding Israel and creating the boundaries for the fledgling nation. Now he has found himself in relative peace and decides to move onto the next project. But God has other plans. David's offer to build the Lord a house, a temple, reflects a human desire to fit God into our system of understanding. Though God will eventually have a temple in Jerusalem, it will be built at His command, not the other way around. God doesn't chastise David. Instead, God reminds him of all that He has done and provided. He then promises to to build Himself a house, but not one made of wood and stone. Rather, a living house, an everlasting dynasty through David. The house God intends is beyond compare to what David had in mind.

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*God does not shrink to fit into our vision of the world. He stretches us  
to discover the wonders He has in store for us. What wonders have  
you experienced this Advent season?*

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December 24, 2020

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December 25, 2020

## Questions

*But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Luke 1:34)*

If only we all had received a vision from an angel at the start of this year, informing us of what was to come. Imagine the questions we would have had! Even Mary, who was perfect in every way, had questions about what was going to happen to her. The answers she received weren't exactly the most detailed either. There was no step-by-step plan, no how-to for telling your betrothed you were pregnant. While she did receive an answer, it wasn't as if she had it all figured out. Clearly, neither do we. We have questions every day about what's going to happen next, how will we tackle the next problem, and all of the what ifs that flood our brains. We often forget that we have some of the answers already. God keeps His promises. He is with us, no matter what is happening around us. We belong to Him, we are His children. Jesus, true God and true Man, came into the world as a baby and continued to be present in the world at every Mass and wherever two or three are gathered in His name. Have no fear, you are not alone.

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*Where has God been especially present to you this Advent season?*

  
  
  

## Unfinished

*"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)*

One of the most decisive moments in human history has come to fulfillment today. Mary's *fiat* has become human flesh and is the Son of God. Notice how Mary speaks of the future, *may it be done to me*. The event the angel spoke of hasn't happened yet. Mary, though perfect, was still unfinished. There was more to ponder, more to learn, more to suffer. The birth of Jesus is the beginning of a new chapter in Mary's life. If Mary, the Mother of God, was still unfinished clay in the hands of her Father, how much more so are we? There is a certain comfort in recognizing that you are not finished. In this moment, there are things that you both like and do not like about yourself. There are plans God has for you which have been completed, but many more that are still in motion. The goal is holiness and heaven, we are all still walking the path to get there.

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*You are an unfinished, but still at this very moment, a priceless work of art. Take some time to thank God for His loving presence in your life and ask for the grace to continue to be molded and shaped by His merciful hands.*



I hope that you enjoyed this journal, I would love to hear from you. If you have any suggestions or comments for Lent or Advent next year, please reach out to me. You can find me at [dailygraces.net](http://dailygraces.net), on the Facebook page Daily Graces, Twitter @KateTaliaferro or on Instagram.

*May your hearts and homes be blessed this Advent Season and may the peace of Christ come to reign in both forever.*