

Daily Feast

MEDITATIONS FROM
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

✿ YEAR C ✿

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WJK WESTMINSTER
JOHN KNOX PRESS
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

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Introduction

When we opened the first volume of *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* and began reading, we knew that the contents were consistent with the title. As teachers and preachers, to have four perspectives on the lectionary in one volume truly satisfied our hunger for rich engagement with biblical texts. With the publication of each additional volume in the twelve-volume series, we became excited about the possibilities for the ways these essays could be resources for other spiritual practices.

This book is designed to give you a chance to step back and focus on a smaller piece from some of the essays from the *Feasting on the Word* commentaries. Whether you are a pastor, educator, church member, or lay leader, let these reflections on biblical texts be a daily feast for your continuing formation in the life of the Christian faith.

Consider the ways that *Daily Feast* might be used:

- **Daily meditation:** Begin or end your day with a reading and reflection on one of the texts for the week.
- **Journaling:** As you read, think, and pray, journal in response to the thoughts that are evoked for you. Some find that journaling with words works best. Others find that using markers, crayons, or watercolors invites a different kind of imaging in response to text.
- **Preparing for preaching or worship leadership:** Have a copy of this available to give to liturgists and choir directors, all those involved in worship leadership. As staff or worship teams work on liturgy and prepare for worship leadership, this book can become a resource for meditation and prayer, and may even be adapted for use in worship.
- **Preparing for teaching:** Use in your own meditation during the week as you prepare your heart and mind to teach all ages of God's children.

- **Reaching out beyond the church:** Use in a variety of settings where a pastoral presence is invited to participate, such as social agencies, health-care facilities, hospitals, prisons, and mission trips.
- **Beginning or concluding an adult class in the church school:** Read a selection and a prayer as a time of centering.
- **In committee meetings or staff meetings:** Use a *Daily Feast* selection as an opening meditation.

Note that portions of the texts for each Sunday are presented, beginning on the previous Monday, so that you can spend the week reflecting on the Scripture passages for the coming Sunday. Each weekday and Saturday will feature reflections on one of the four passages—Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel—along with a response and a prayer. Sundays and special days such as Christmas Eve and Holy Week will contain reflections on all four of the texts. (See “A Note from the Publisher” for more information about the Revised Common Lectionary and an explanation of how Feasting on the Word follows the lections during Ordinary Time.)

Included here are brief excerpts from each of the Scripture readings, but we encourage you to have a Bible handy so you can read the complete passage.

As we have read texts and the reflections on these texts from the four perspectives, we found ourselves slowing down, taking time to read Scripture, and connecting with these essays in new ways. We anticipate that the variety and depth of the perspectives on biblical texts of the authors of the essays will enrich your own spiritual practices.

We hope that our experience will be yours. So take some time. Read the text. Read the reflection. Consider your response, and be in prayer. May this resource be a daily feast for you.

Kathleen Bostrom, Elizabeth Caldwell, and Jana Riess

A Note from the Publisher

This devotional is a part of the series *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, a twelve-volume commentary series for preaching and teaching. The uniqueness of the approach in the *Feasting* commentaries is in providing four perspectives on each preaching occasion from the Revised Common Lectionary. The theological, pastoral, exegetical, and homiletical dimensions of each biblical passage are explored with the hope that preachers will find much to inform and stimulate their preparations for preaching from this rich “feast” of materials.

Feasting on the Word follows the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) as developed by the Consultation on Common Texts, an ecumenical consultation of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada. The RCL provides a collection of readings from Scripture to be used during worship in a schedule that follows the seasons of the church year. In addition, it provides for a uniform set of readings to be used across denominations or other church bodies.

The RCL provides a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm response to that reading, a Gospel, and an Epistle for each preaching occasion of the year. It is presented in a three-year cycle, with each year centered around one of the Synoptic Gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew, Year B is the year of Mark, and Year C is the year of Luke. John is read each year, especially during Advent, Lent, and Easter. The RCL offers two tracks of Old Testament texts for the Season after Pentecost or Ordinary Time: a semicontinuous track, which moves through stories and characters in the Old Testament, and a complementary track, which ties the Old Testament texts to the theme of the Gospel texts for that day. Some denominational traditions favor one over the other. For instance, Presbyterians and Methodists generally follow the semicontinuous track, while Lutherans and Episcopalians generally follow the complementary track. To

appeal to an ecumenical audience, the readings in this devotional follow the complementary track for Year A, are split between the complementary and semicontinuous tracks for Year B, and cover the semicontinuous stream for Year C.

Because not all lectionary days are used in a given year, depending on how the calendar falls, you may not need some of the readings here until a subsequent lectionary cycle. Check the official RCL Web site at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu> for a list of readings for the current year.

Originally designed to be a twelve-volume set of preaching commentaries, the series has now grown to include several other related projects in addition to this devotional. A full church school curriculum program is now available at www.feastingontheword.net/curriculum. A three-volume set of worship resources to complement the commentaries is now in development, as is a guide for preaching the children's sermon. A major new undertaking using the four-perspective approach, *Feasting on the Gospels*, a seven-volume series of commentaries on the entirety of the Gospels, will be published, beginning in 2013. Information about these projects can be found on the Feasting on the Word Web site, www.feastingontheword.net.

Finally, we would like to thank all who were involved in the original Feasting on the Word series, including our partner, Columbia Theological Seminary; general editors David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor; editorial board members Charles L. Campbell, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, Gary W. Charles, Allen Hilton, Cynthia A. Jarvis, E. Elizabeth Johnson, Thomas G. Long, Kathleen M. O'Connor, Marcia Y. Riggs, George W. Stroup, Emilie M. Townes, Richard F. Ward; project manager Joan Murchison; and project compiler Mary Lynn Darden.

THE WEEK LEADING UP TO THE

❁ *First Sunday of Advent* ❁

Jeremiah 33:14–16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. (vv. 14–15)

Psalm 25:1–10

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long. (vv. 4–5)

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. (vv. 9–10)

Luke 21:25–36

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (vv. 29–33)

➤ **MONDAY** ◀

Jeremiah 33:14–16

REFLECTION

Theological imagination is not speculative, but relies on God's continuous presence and acts on behalf of creation over time. Trusting in God's provision for us in the past, we imagine what shape God's fulfillment of promises will take in the future. Although we do not bring about God's intended alternative future through sheer force of will, in our waiting we do try to place ourselves in a posture so that we might become partners with God in the advent of a new reality.

JENNIFER RYAN AYRES

RESPONSE

What partnership is God inviting you to participate in this Advent?

PRAYER

For the promises you have made and kept O God, I am indeed grateful. Amen.

⇒ TUESDAY ⇐

Jeremiah 33:14–16

REFLECTION

The stories of Advent are dug from the harsh soil of human struggle and the littered landscape of dashed dreams. They are told from the vista where sin still reigns supreme and hope has gone on vacation. Many prefer the major notes of joy and gladness in the Christmas stories to the minor keys of Advent. Advent also leaves us dizzy over time. Advent is not a steady, constant, “time marches on” kind of time, a persistent drumbeat of day after day, year after year. Advent is unpredictable time, unsteady time. In this time-tumbling season, we look for a baby to be born while we know that the baby has already been born, and still is being born in us—this Emmanuel who came and is coming and is among us right now. Not only is Advent not well behaved, neat, and orderly; it contorts time. Given the nature of Advent, it is no surprise that Jeremiah is its herald.

GARY W. CHARLES

RESPONSE

When has your hope taken a vacation this year?

PRAYER

Sometimes I forget, O God, that time is kairos in your hands not mine. Amen.

→ WEDNESDAY ←

Psalm 25:1–10

REFLECTION

The beginning of Advent may be just the right time to consider the ten verses of petition, praise, and promise in this lection from Psalm 25. Emphasis in the first portion of the passage on the writer's needs—for deliverance, for guidance, and for forgiveness—presents a lens for reflecting on how the Advent gift to come may respond to these specific needs as well as to the needs of many, many others. Lament, honesty, and hope form the progression through the text and are interrelated elements of the response to needs included there.

ROSETTA E. ROSS

RESPONSE

What composes your Advent prayer this day? What guidance, forgiveness, or deliverance do you need?

PRAYER

Lord of my life, I put my trust in you this day. Amen.

⇒ THURSDAY ⇐

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

REFLECTION

On the First Sunday of Advent many congregations light the hope candle. A vision of “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” can encourage hope, regardless of how or when it occurs, whether the hearer conceives of this coming literally in history or metaphorically in the experiences of individuals and communities. To be ready for the “coming of our Lord Jesus” is a faithful way of living not dependent on predictions as to when. Endings and beginnings abound. Personal tragedy or world calamity can intrude at any time. Faithful preparation and expectant living can help us face whatever comes. Paul’s words of assurance that were intended to “restore whatever is lacking” in the faith of the Thessalonians can bolster the faith of contemporary hearers as well and can be the impetus for all to “increase and abound in love.”

PHILIP E. CAMPBELL

RESPONSE

What is lacking in your faith that needs to be restored in this Advent season of waiting and preparation?

PRAYER

God of hope, I wait with hope for your advent in my life. Amen.

➤ FRIDAY ◀

Luke 21:25–36

REFLECTION

This Jesus taught as a second Jeremiah. “The world’s a scary place, but don’t let your hearts be troubled. I have overcome the world. So wait in the midst of it all, just before the dawn, for in the midst of the night there are strange and redeeming events afoot.” And with this the church begins a new year, asked to begin afresh, not just on a calendar, but in individual hearts, in relationships, in congregations, and in our yearning for a promise worth living for. Hearers of this passage are bidden to live lives of faithful, active waiting in the meantime because they hear again the name of the One who holds them in the ending time.

WESLEY D. AVRAM

RESPONSE

What fresh thing is waiting to be born in your life or the life of the congregation of which you are a part?

PRAYER

Redeeming God, I wait with fresh eyes and ears for the new things you will do in my life. Amen.

⇒ SATURDAY ⇐

Luke 21:25–36

REFLECTION

The good news of Advent is not simply that Christ is coming, but that his coming means we can hope, despite all that is falling apart in our lives, our communities, and the world around us. Just as the leaves on the fig tree offer hope in late winter that summer is coming again, so God's word, in Jesus, promises us new life. Advent offers us expectation and hope for something new. "Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (v. 28). "Be alert at all times" (v. 36).

KATHY BEACH-VERHEY

RESPONSE

For what are you praying this Advent season? What is your hope?

PRAYER

God of our Advent, in the midst of all that challenges stability and continuity in this world, help me remember the hope of new beginnings. Amen.

→ SUNDAY ←

Jeremiah 33:14–16

REFLECTION

As I listen to the cries of Jeremiah throughout the scope of his prophecy, I long for the day that is surely coming when God's future will be a reality beyond the violent boastings of the ruling Babylon of the day. I long for the day that is surely coming when in God's future the poor are not sent to shelters or forced to sleep on the streets. I long for the day that is surely coming when God's future has no space for violence, when we will stop producing body bags—because there are no dead soldiers to fill them. I long for the day that is surely coming when God's future affords no room for rancor, a day when our world is no longer torn asunder by racism and sexism and homophobia.

GARY W. CHARLES

Psalm 25:1–10

REFLECTION

In much of the Northern Hemisphere Advent comes in the “bleak midwinter.” No wonder people want to party. Still, at a deeper level, it is also possible that this may be experienced as the time of year when, as the earth lies fallow, we dwell in expectancy of the new life we hope spring will bring. This mind-set shapes the way the church in this hemisphere observes Advent. In a cold and fallow season, a season characterized by waiting and watching and wondering, it is not surprising that one might find oneself reflecting on the past and looking to the future, taking stock and hoping for something better in the springtime to come.

RANDLE R. (RICK) MIXON

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

REFLECTION

In the first section, Timothy brings a good report to Paul, who

rejoices in it. The next section contains Paul's ethical message to the church. Paul moves from praise to paraenesis by way of prayer. His prayer provides not only the transitional words that carry the text from the past to the future, but also the key word "now." I have a friend who moves regularly from one meeting to another. She frequently cannot find a nearby parking place, but that does not bother her. As she said once with a smile, "I got to pray for six blocks today." This Advent, as we wait in line at the checkout stand, get tired telephone ears from being on hold, and wonder how long we must wait to get out of this traffic jam, our daily devotions can be enriched by those open-eyed transitional prayers that join the past and future of our faith story with a blessed "God is Now."

JOSEPH R. JETER

Luke 21:25–36

REFLECTION

Luke wrote with a deep and growing sense that Christian discipleship is a kind of living in between—aware of Jesus, waiting for Jesus, and coming to know this Jesus for whom we wait in the midst of an eventful, unpredictable, even tumultuous world, waiting to stand before him, yet not always knowing where he is.

WESLEY D. AVRAM

RESPONSE

During this Advent season spend some time journaling. Today, respond to these:

I long for . . .

I expect . . .

I wait for . . .

PRAYER

Ever-present God, keep my eyes alert, watching for signs of your Advent all around me. Amen.

THE WEEK LEADING UP TO THE
❁ *Second Sunday of Advent* ❁

Malachi 3:1-4

But who can endure the day of his coming,
and who can stand when he appears?
For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap (v. 2)

Luke 1:68-79

“By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (vv. 78-79)

Philippians 1:3-11

I am confident of this, that the one who began
a good work among you will bring it to completion
by the day of Jesus Christ. (vv. 3-6)

Luke 3:1-6

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (vv. 4-6)

⇒ MONDAY ⇐

Malachi 3:1-4

REFLECTION

Malachi has some good questions for our day. His very use of questions as a means of prophetic revelation counters the unthinking certitude of much so-called religious conviction. “Who can endure the day of his coming?” (3:2) Who will be “pure and blameless” in the day of Christ? (Phil. 1:10) Who will prepare the way by repentance and forgiveness? (Luke 3:1-6) Advent questions! Advent questions our worthiness, readiness, and willingness for Christ’s coming. “The descendants of Levi” are called to new “integrity and uprightness,” a turning “from iniquity,” and a renewed “reverence” for God’s “covenant of life and well-being” with us (Mal. 2:5-6). Like the ancient priesthood, the contemporary priesthood of believers opens its life to the refining presence of God and offers its life in righteous practice.

DEBORAH A. BLOCK

RESPONSE

What are your Advent questions?

PRAYER

God of new beginnings, I humbly offer my life of faith. Help me be ready, prepared, and willing to respond to your call to my life. Amen.

⇒ **TUESDAY** ⇐

Malachi 3:1-4

REFLECTION

Look inside. Look inside yourself. Look inside your congregation. Look inside your church. What will God's refining look like? Perhaps the faces in our pews will reflect the rainbow of pigmentation in God's world more than they do. Perhaps there will be fewer luxury cars in the church parking lot and more beds for the homeless. What will our worship and our stewardship look like if "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem [and Chicago and Dallas and Tuscaloosa and Juneau and First Presbyterian and St. Martin's Lutheran] will be pleasing to the LORD" (v. 4)? These would be worthwhile questions to ponder.

SETH MOLAND-KOVASH

RESPONSE

How might God's refining work take form in your congregation?

PRAYER

It's not always easy, O God, to look inside. It's not always easy to look outside to the places where your refining work is needed. Help me do that. Amen.

→ WEDNESDAY ←

Luke 1:68–79

REFLECTION

Although Zechariah's is quite possibly the most endearing, heartwarming prophecy over a child in the biblical text, what makes the prophecy so compelling is that Zechariah is not primarily concerned about himself or about his miraculous son. Instead, Zechariah's prophecy exalts God, points to the dominant work of the Dayspring, and foretells God's tender mercies on upcoming generations of God's covenant people. Zechariah conveys a sense of wonder that he is part of it. He—with all his arrogance and unbelief—basks now in the love, forgiveness, mercy of God.

ROBIN GALLAHER BRANCH

RESPONSE

In what ways are you like Zechariah?

PRAYER

God of tender mercies, may I share the wonder and belief of your Prophet Zechariah as I prepare to receive the gift of the Christ child. Amen.

➤ THURSDAY ◀

Luke 1:68–79

REFLECTION

Zechariah's hymn makes clear that true peace—in our hearts and in our world—will come only when we are right with God, when we have laid aside our own ambitions and passions, or at least turned them over to God. The condition of souls and the condition of creation is troubled by self-centeredness, self-absorption, and failure to understand what is available in true communion with God, what God has offered us in the ancient covenant and offers us still in the coming of Jesus, the Christ. Though we may live in between times, when we do not yet fully walk in the way of peace, Zechariah promises that his little boy, John, will prepare us to bridge those times as we live toward God's reign in hope.

RANDLE R. (RICK) MIXON

RESPONSE

What darkness have you sat in this year? Who or what brought light to you?

PRAYER

Merciful God, like your prophet, I too need you to guide my feet so that I walk in the ways of peace. Amen.

➔ FRIDAY ◀

Philippians 1:3–11

REFLECTION

On this Second Sunday of Advent, as Malachi shouts from the mountaintop his prophecy that God is a refining fire, Paul whispers from prison his prayer that God will help Philippian Christians to become pure and blameless. But his depiction of these two virtues is hardly about avoidance of impurity. Rather, Paul begins in his prayer to paint a picture of active love itself, the starting point toward purity and blamelessness and the catalyst for unified community. These prayed hopes are not confined to antiquity, of course. Paul would desire them for us too, and so they reverberate through the two intervening millennia and whisper into our own twenty-first-century lives and churches.

ALLEN HILTON

RESPONSE

What would a picture of active love look like if you painted it? Take out your crayons or pens and try drawing it.

PRAYER

For all those people who bring light into my life, I am grateful this day. Amen.

⇒ SATURDAY ⇐

Luke 3:1-6

REFLECTION

Advent is a season of preparation. At home people are cleaning, getting out their Christmas decorations, purchasing a tree, baking, hosting and attending parties, and simply getting ready for Christmas. But into our Advent “busy-ness” each year enters John the Baptist. He interrupts our schedules and demands that preparations of a different kind be made. John demands that we get ready for Jesus. Before we can bask in Christmas joy and the birth of a special baby, John forces us to examine ourselves and our world. In the style of the Old Testament prophets before him, John challenges Advent people with a message of personal and corporate self-examination. Advent, John reminds us, is a time to prepare to welcome Jesus and not simply our invited Christmas houseguests.

KATHY BEACH-VERHEY

RESPONSE

As you prepare for Christmas, what needs to be cleaned, discovered, and rewired in your life?

PRAYER

Advent God, in the busy-ness of this season, slow me down. Interrupt my life and help me get ready for Jesus, again. Amen.

→ SUNDAY ←

Malachi 3:1–4

REFLECTION

Analogies and allusions abound between the people addressed by Malachi and contemporary congregations in the United States. Competing voices proclaim the “right” direction; rival leaders clamor for power. What would constitute faithful covenant living during this season of Advent?

ANGELA BAUER-LEVESQUE

Luke 1:68–79

REFLECTION

God in the silence of centuries has done preparatory work for Israel. God in the silence of nine months has done preparatory work in Zechariah. God saved Zechariah from his own unbelief. God can save Israel from enemies. Zechariah’s prophecy looks forward. God moved on Zechariah and Elizabeth’s behalf and linked their personal miracle of a son to wider miracles for Israel. Zechariah doesn’t understand it. He doesn’t have to. He rejoices and lets God manage the details. Zechariah will spend his remaining days a happy “praiser” mentoring this miraculous child.

ROBIN GALLAGHER BRANCH

Philippians 1:3–11

REFLECTION

The passage that opens the apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi is striking in its emotion and intimacy. It suggests a deep, and potentially enduring, relationship. The key theological themes are remembering, joy, and fellowship. Paul’s recollection elicits thanksgiving, his joy is rooted in shared

tribulation, and the longing for fellowship can only be fulfilled in Christ.

JAMES H. EVANS JR.

Luke 3:1–6

REFLECTION

The imagery of leveling and straightening need not be taken as counsel to sameness or uniformity, as if the operative characteristic of flattening is the resulting plain. The imagery is best taken at a step removed, so that the prophet's call is to the action of making, opening, and clearing the way for God, rather than to some fixed image of the result of that work.

WESLEY D. AVRAM

RESPONSE

As you continue your Advent Sabbath journaling, respond to these:

I am preparing for . . .

I am clearing out . . .

PRAYER

God of our advents, as the second candle is lit, remind me of the hope I have. Amen.