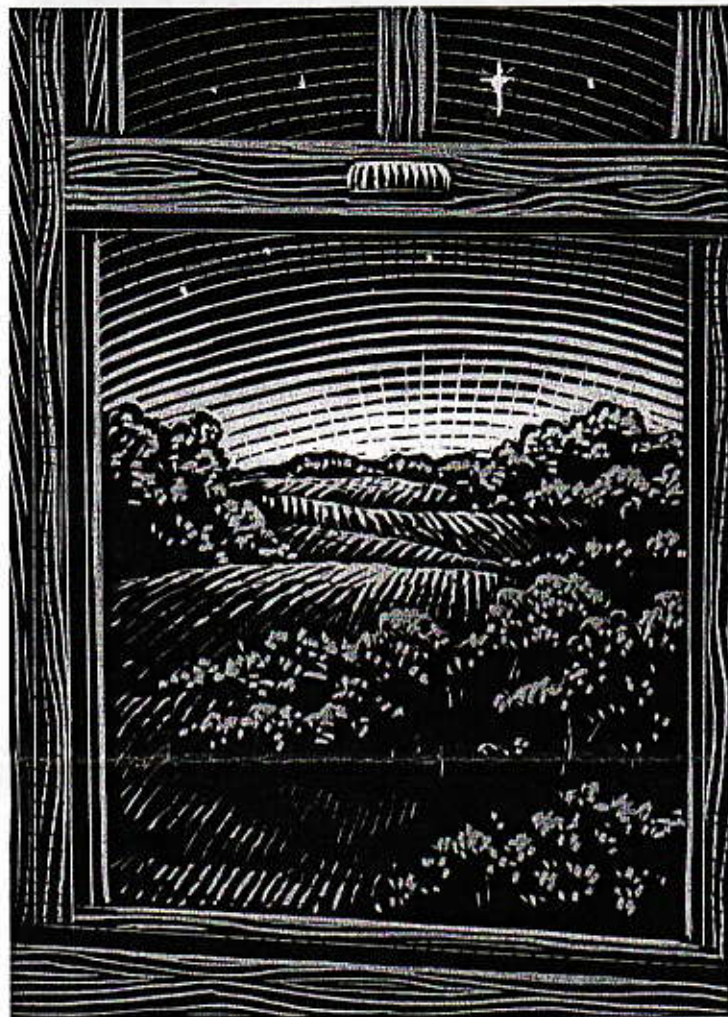


First Sunday of Advent



Prayer for Patience and Watchfulness

Lord God, maker of heaven and earth,
by signs and wonders, great and small,
you prepare us for the fulfillment
of your promise,
the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the light that will dawn.
He is the bright morning star of justice.
His presence is the sign of your love,
and his grace will increase our love—
for one another and for you.

Grant us patience
as we wait for Christ to come
in the fullness of time.
Help us to see the signs that point to him
and to stay awake so that when he arrives
we will be found watching and ready.

We ask this through the same Christ our
Lord. Amen.

November 29, 2009 Eager Watching

Each year, many of us begin the great Church year as the natural world goes into transition. Days grow shorter, the air becomes colder or wetter, and we anticipate winter. This season of Advent is a reminder that we live in a state of transition even now. Christ has come to this world; Christ will come again, and we live our lives between those great promises of God with the help of the Spirit. It is appropriate, then, that our readings remind us of God's promise fulfilled (a just descendant of David) and the promise to come ("the Son of Man coming in a cloud," Luke 21:27). Jeremiah tells us that the divine branch from David's tree will "execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 15).

Jesus' life and teachings called people to enter into a right relationship with God by loving God and neighbor. His example demonstrated what justice and righteousness was about. Paul prays for the grace of God to strengthen the hearts of all who follow Christ so that they might love as fully as possible, anticipating Jesus' return with joy. Luke offers the challenge: Watch for the signs; do not sleep—a timely reminder for us who might be complacent about our behavior or impatient with all this waiting. As we move toward Christmas and the celebration of new birth in the world, our lives should reflect our eager watching for the coming of Christ, not just at Advent but all the time.

This Week at Home



Monday, November 30

Saint Andrew

We know Andrew mainly as the brother of Simon Peter. Did Andrew feel overshadowed by Peter? We may never know, but we do know from the account in Matthew that Andrew joined his brother at Jesus' side. And in John's account, Andrew actually called Peter to come and see Jesus. Jesus calls us all to be brothers and sisters to him and to one another. In this way we come into our own and find our true identities.

Tuesday, December 1

The Advent Wreath

By now the Advent wreaths have been set on dining room tables in many homes. An Advent wreath contains several powerful signs: the circular wreath reminds us of our eternal God, the evergreen branches remind us of life, and the candles symbolize the light of Christ. Each week another candle is lit, a sign of the coming of Christ into the world. You can light the wreath each evening at dinner using a simple prayer: *As we light the candle(s) of this wreath, O Lord, we ask that you come and enlighten our hearts.*

Wednesday, December 2

Feeding the Hungry

In today's Gospel, (Luke 10:21–24) we hear of Jesus' feeding of the four thousand. This is the second of two feeding stories in Matthew. The first is the more familiar—Jesus feeds five thousand people and has twelve baskets left over. Scholars tell us that the baskets were symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. Today's story may be a repetition of the first story, or it may refer to the mission to the Gentiles that will unfold after Christ's Ascension. In either case, we are reminded that we are to follow Jesus and help to feed those who are hungry. Think about donating to a canned food drive, or offer to cook for a shelter sometime this season.

Thursday, December 3

Saint Francis Xavier

Saint Francis Xavier (1506–1522) was a devoted follower of Saint Ignatius and was ordained a priest in 1537. He was passionate about winning the world for Christ, and his devotion eventually led him to India and much of the Far East. There he embraced a life of poverty, preached the Gospel, and spent much time in prayer. He died alone in 1552, trying to gain entrance into China. Today, Francis is known as the patron of missions. We may not go far from home, but we, too, are called to bring Christ to the world through words and deeds of love.

Friday, December 4

Saint John of Damascus

Saint John of Damascus was a writer and poet and one of the greatest of the early Church fathers. In the Eastern Church he was known as the "golden speaker" for his wisdom and knowledge. He composed hymns, which remain in use in the Eastern Church today. Among his many contributions are his writings on the Assumption of Mary (for that he is known as the "Doctor of the Assumption") and his passionate defense of the veneration of icons.

Saturday, December 5

Passing on the Gift of Love

When Jesus sends the Twelve out on mission, he makes it clear that they have been given a gift of love and grace from God and that they are to pass that gift on freely to those they meet. In Advent we remember that God gave us the gift of his Son because he loved us. Throughout the year, we can best honor that gift by loving others and caring for their needs. Find a way to care for the poor this Christmas, and then participate in that service with joy and gladness.

