

**Monday January 2<sup>nd</sup>** – (Read Psalm 96:1-2) **IN THE FAMILY OF GOD**, our responsibility to each other extends beyond race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and sexual orientation. When persons are in need, we all bear a familial responsibility to be present. It might take us some time to discern to whom and how God invites us to be present with our unique gifts and circumstances. Where there is economic poverty, we are called to recognize our siblings among the poor. Where there is social and political injustice, we are called to recognize our siblings among those who bear the brunt of injustice.

“As God is often made manifest to us through the people we encounter, we need not be surprised if part of the invitation of waiting in Advent involves inquiring of God how we might be channels of love and even answers to the prayers of those who wait for restoration of body, mind, and spirit.”

– Enuma Okoro

*Silence and Other Surprising Invitations of Advent*

**Tuesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>** – (Read Isaiah 9:2) **THE GOOD NEWS** of Jesus’ birth comes first to the shepherds, humble and hardworking people, tending to their flock by night. God knew these men could not bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as the wise men who would arrive later.

“Emmanuel, “God with us,” came among us in a manger where all could come and kneel to worship him. There were no barriers of dress code, entrance fees, or guards at the door. From his first breath, God was available to all.”

– *Meeting the Messiah*

**Wednesday, January 4<sup>th</sup>** – (Read Matthew 1:23) **BEING REAL INSTEAD OF BEING RIGHT**. Somewhere along the deeper journey, we find that the competitive drive begins to lose its steam. We no longer feel compelled to win the argument. Convincing someone else of our point of view decreases in significance. Winning loses its allure. Correspondingly, we experience a burning desire to act out of a sense of integrity. This means that we’ll probably listen to others more intently rather than rushing to a rebuttal in our heads. Our need to feel superior – to be right – loses its hold on us. We sincerely want to hear others, understand them, and try to experience the world through their eyes. After all, they may have something to teach us if we listen with full attention. We do not become so wavering in our opinions and convictions that we stand for nothing. In fact, considering the viewpoints of others can often clarify our own beliefs and refine our evaluation of an issue. Clearer discernment can arise when we have the grace to ponder diverse outlooks in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

“Being real means we may have to utter those dreaded words, “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know” or “You have a point there.” As we grow, our competitiveness morphs into cooperation and often into compromise. Our ego, which needs to be the best, the brightest, and the “rightest” says a reluctant good-bye!”

– Linda Douty

*Rhythms of Growth*

**Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>** – (Read Psalm 80:7) **GRATITUDE AND ITS CLOSE COUSIN, JOY**, result from action, not just feeling. Active joyfulness brings with it an awareness of who we are and an acknowledgment that all we have are gifts from a generous, loving God. We search for signs of the good in the people and situations around us. We work to give up selfish perspectives and join more closely in the movements of God in the world.

“Prayer: Loving God, help me be the face of joy to someone who might be struggling today. If I am facing struggles of my own, gently guide my thoughts toward gratitude that I may rejoice always in you. Amen.”

– Beth Richardson, *The Uncluttered Heart*

**Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup>** – (Read Isaiah 7:15) **FROM THE SHEPHERDS’** point of view, the parents of a child who was truly the Messiah would reject them because of their own low social status. How could shepherds be convinced to expect a welcome if they visited this family?

“The angels seemed to anticipate the shepherds’ anxiety and told the shepherds they would find the baby wrapped in bands of cloth. That would provide a clue to the shepherds that they were not social inferiors to these parents. Furthermore, the angels alerted the shepherds that they would find the baby lying in an animals’ food trough. This information told them they would find the Christ child in an ordinary peasant home such as theirs. He was not in a governor’s mansion or a wealthy merchant’s guest room but in a simple two-room house like theirs. This was really good news. So they would not be told, “Unclean shepherds—be gone!” Bands of cloth and a feeding trough as a cradle were true and good signs for lowly shepherds.”

– Jan Johnson, *Taste and See*

**Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup>** – (Read Matthew 11:2-3) **IN TRULY STUNNING** fashion, God orchestrates Mary and Elizabeth’s pregnancies six months apart. It is a testament to God’s care and provision that each woman has someone to journey with as she navigates the peculiar season in which she finds herself. The gift of a believing community can make all the difference in the form our challenging waiting seasons take. By intentionally seeking out one another, Mary and Elizabeth journey together and support each other. They affirm God’s miracle-working power in each of their lives. Their presence before each other serves as a daily reminder of God’s faithfulness and a visual assurance of God’s promises. ...

“We should not be surprised at the divine consideration in having this young girl and this old woman wait together for the fulfillment of God’s respective words to them. ... God created us to flourish in our interconnectedness and mutual support of one another. We need one another to remind us that all things are possible with God and to help us trust the narrative that God’s reign is both at hand and still to come. In the midst of uncomfortable waiting, we need voices that also speak to our blessedness. Sharing our stories adds perspectives that can bolster our faith when life overwhelms, frightens, or takes us by surprise.”

– Enuma Okoro

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