Jesus Christ – Ruler of All
“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev. 11:15)
- The Son of Man, by Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979)
- The Spirit Prepares Us to Receive the Son of God, by Irenaeus (130-200 AD)
- Exalted Over All: the Victory of the Redeemer, by Steve Clark
- The Two Comings of Christ, by Thomas Hopko
- Prisoners of Hope: Reflections for Advent, by Dave Quintana
- The House of David, and Jesus: A Portrait of Kingship, by Jeanne Kun
- A Broken Man and a Broken City, by Martin Jordan
- Personal Encounters, by Finja Schmidt, and Learning to Love, by Thomas Ryan
- Breaking Barriers and Building Bonds Across Borders, by Stephen Bick
- Serving the Dying of Kolkata and Filled With God's Blessing, by Marc Barbara
- The Debtor Who Wouldn't Go Away, by Ted Kennedy
- Waiting to Honor, by Ted Kennedy
- Who Needs a Life of Purpose? by Sam Williamson
- Christ Ruler of All: Portraying the Lord in early Christian Art, by Don Schwager
- David, Prototype of Christ, by Damasus Winzen, Christmas Carol, by Ed Conlin
- And He Lived Among Us, by Jeanne Therese Hilario Andres

Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.
No title did our Lord use more often to describe himself than “the Son of Man.” No one else ever called him by that title, but he used it of himself at least eighty times. Nor is it “a Son of Man,” that he called himself, but “the Son of Man.” His existence, both eternal and temporal, is in it. In his conversation with Nicodemus he indicated that he was God in the form of man.

There is One who came down from heaven;  
the Son of Man who dwells in heaven.

God so loved the world that  
He gave his only begotten Son…  
– John 3:13, 16

That “the Son of Man” referred to his human nature, which was in personal union with his divine nature, is evidenced from the fact that the first time our Lord ever referred to himself as “the Son of Man” was when he was
recognized by his disciples as the Son of God.

**As God he could not suffer**

Christ entered into human existence under a form which was not natural to him as the Son of God. This assuming of a human nature was a humiliation, an emptying, a stripping and a *kenosis* of his glory. The fundamental renouncement of his divine glory created a physical condition of life which made him appear like a man – his suffering and death were the logical consequences of this humiliation. As God he could not suffer – as man he could.

This distinction between the Son of Man and Son of God, he often made. On one occasion, when his enemies sought to kill him, he said:

> You belong to earth, I to heaven;  
> You to this world, I to another.  
> – John 8:23

**As Son of Man he suffered for us**

Sometimes the title “the Son of Man” is used with reference to his coming on the last day to judge all men. At other times, it referred to his Messianic mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and to bring forgiveness of sinners. But more often it refers to his passion, death and resurrection. Hidden in it was his mission as Savior and his humiliation as God in the weakness of human flesh. As a king might take another name while traveling incognito, so the Son of God took another name, “the Son of Man,” not to deny his divinity but better to affirm the new condition he had taken. Since he was humbling himself and making himself obedient, even to the death on the cross, the title “the Son of Man” stood for the shame, abasement, and grief which is the human lot. It was descriptive of what he became, rather than of what he is from all eternity. “The Son of Man” or the “Man of Sorrows” was, he said, also the object of prophecy:
What is written of the Son of Man?
That he must be much ill-used, and despised.
– Mark 9:11

Because the name implied not only humiliation but identification with sinful mankind, *he never used the term after he had redeemed humanity and risen from the dead*. The glorified lips of the “Resurrection and the Life” never again pronounce “the Son of Man.” He had left behind him the oneness with unredeemed humanity.

That the lowliness of his present condition was what he wished to emphasize became evident from his oneness with the woes and miseries of men. If men were homeless, he would be homeless:

> Foxes have holes,  
> and the birds of the air their resting-places;  
> the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.  
> – Matthew 8:20

Since the truth he came to bring to this earth was reserved for those who accepted his divinity, and was not something to tickle ears, he never used “the Son of Man” as the source of that truth. The truth he brought was divine truth, final and absolute. Hence he avoided using the term “Son of Man” in relation to his divine nature, which was one with the Father.

> I have knowledge of him,  
> and I am true to his Word.  
> – John 8:55

> I am the Truth.  
> – John 14:6

> Believe me when I tell you this.  
> – John 6:32
The best judge of men and women
But when it came to judging the world, at the end of time, separating the sheep and the goats, holding the scales of virtue and vice in each soul, that privilege and authority was his because he suffered and redeemed mankind as “the Son of Man.” Because he was obedient unto death, his Father exalted him as Judge. Knowing what was in man, as “the Son of Man,” he could best judge man.

The Father…has also granted him power
to execute judgment,
since he is the Son of Man.
– John 5:27

Though “the Son of Man” expressed his federation with humanity, He was very careful to note that he was like man in all things save sin. He challenged his hearers to convict him of sin. But the consequences of sin were all his as “the Son of Man.” Hence the prayer to let the chalice pass. His endurance of hunger and thirst. His agony and bloody sweat. Perhaps even his seeming older than he actually was. His condescension to wash the feet of his disciples. His absence of resentment as the swine-owning capitalists ordered him from their shores. His endurance of false charges of being a winebibber, a glutton. His gentleness, which expressed itself in hiding when his enemies would have stoned him. Above all, his endurance of worry, anxiety, fear, pain, mental anguish, fever, hunger, thirst, and agony during the hours of His Passion. All these things were to inspire men to imitate “the Son of Man.” Nothing that was human was foreign to him.

Human infirmity touched him
The human family has its trials. So he sanctified them by living in a family. Labor and work done by the sweat of the brow were humanity’s lot. Therefore he, “the Son of Man,” became a carpenter. No single human affliction which befalls man as the result of sin escaped his oneness with it.

He took our infirmities upon himself,
and bore our sicknesses.
– Matthew 8:17

Isaiah had prophesied this incorporation with human frailty. Though there is no evidence in the Gospels that our Lord was ever ill, there are many instances where he felt sickness as if it were his own, as he felt sin as if it were his own. Hence in the performance of a cure, He sometimes “sighed” or “groaned” after looking up to heaven, the source of his power. Human infirmity touched him so deeply, because deafness, dumbness, leprosy, insanity were the effects of sin, not in the person afflicted but in humanity. Because his death would remove sin which was the cause (though the final release from sickness and error would not come until the resurrection of the just), he said that it was just as easy for him to heal one as the other.

Tell me, which command is more lightly given,
to say to a man, your sins are forgiven,
or to say, Rise up, and walk?
– Matthew 9:5

He sighed because he was a High Priest who was touched by all the “ills that flesh is heir to.” Tears! He wept three times, because humanity weeps. When he saw others weep, such as Mary in grief at her brother’s death, he felt the sorrow as his own.
When he saw her in tears,  
and the tears of the Jews who accompanied her,  
he sighed deeply, and distressed himself over it.  
– John 11:33

In the death and burial of Lazarus he saw the long procession of mourners from the first to the last. And the reason of it all – how death came into the world with the sin of Adam. Within a few days, he knew that he as the second Adam or “the Son of Man,” would take on “the sins of the world,” and thereby give death its death. The restoring of physical health to humanity cost him something, as the restoring of spiritual health cost his life. In the first instance, as the Son of Man, He felt as if an energy that was lost to him went into humanity. When the woman touched the hem of his garment, the Gospel records that he was:

Inwardly aware of the power  
that proceeded from him.  
– Mark 5:30

God chose to enter the human family
Though, therefore, no disease or sin touched him by a contagion, he bore them as a loving mother bears the agony of her child and would, if possible, take it upon herself. But a mother does not have that representative character over her family that Christ had over the human race. He was the new Adam and could bring forgiveness and life to all men, as the first Adam brought to all men sin and death.

Finally, the title “the Son of Man” meant that he was representative not of the Jews alone, nor of the Samaritans alone, but of all mankind. His relation to mankind was similar to that of Adam. The human race has two heads – Adam and the new Adam, Christ. “The Son of Man” was not a particular man, a personal man, but rather a Pattern Man, a Universal Man. It was into the human family that God chose to enter, the perfect phrase to describe it being, Homo factus est. He was made man and qualified himself for co-partnership with human nature. He entered into the reality of common humanity. He assumed a human nature into is sacred person.

Aristotle said that if the gods take interest in human affairs, they may be expected to look with most satisfaction on what is most akin to their own nature. This would imply a certain amount of disdain for the human – hence the Greeks said that manifestations of deity “were too fair to worship, too divine to love.” But in the person of Christ it is the reverse that was true – “He came unto his own.” A sanctifier must be one with those whom he sanctifies. The very separateness in character between the two parties makes it necessary that in some way they should be one. There must be a point of contact, one with the other. He who is like his brethren will have more power over them than one who is not like them. Hence, in order to be a sanctifier, our Blessed Lord had to be a man like his unholy brethren. He would make them holy by reproducing in his life the lost ideal of human character and bringing that ideal to bear on their minds and hearts.

A compassionate high priest
The Ideal had to be an ideal man, “bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh” – “the Son of Man.” He had to be in humanity, stripped of all social advantages, down to the level of the common mass, and presenting there the ideal of excellence among menial surroundings. Thus would he be a compassionate High Priest Who could feel for man and be his true representative before God. The closer he was to his constituents, the better fitted he was for his office. By having compassion on the ignorant and erring, he acquired through his own experience and consciousness of infirmity a likeness to men who suffer.

He could not be a High Priest for man and intercede for man, and pay his debts to the Father, unless he was taken
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from among men. The title “Son of Man” proclaimed this brotherhood with men. But men cannot be brothers unless they have a common father, and God is not a Father unless he has a Son. To believe in the brotherhood of man without the Fatherhood of God would make men a race of bastards.

But sympathy alone is not the full explanation of this title “Son of Man.” He was not only willing, but eager – even under a necessity – to come to their lot. Sympathetic love brought him down from heaven to earth, and fellowship in suffering followed as a matter of course. Love is a vicarious principle. A mother suffers for and with her sick child, as a patriot suffers for his country. No wonder that the Son of Man visited this dark, sinful, wretched earth by becoming Man – Christ’s unity with the sinful was due to his love! Love burdens itself with the wants and woes and losses and even the wrongs of others.

**He was sin-bearer by destiny**

He suffered because he loved. But something more is to be added. It was not just enough for a man to love another man. If this suffering was ever to have any value, he must have something to offer to God for us, and his offering must possess that quality needful to efficacy. It must be perfect and eternally valid. He, therefore, had to be God as well as man, otherwise the reparation and redemption of sinful man would not have value in the sight of God. Sympathy alone would not suffice to form unity between God and the unholy. There must be a divine appointment to the office.

In virtue of the divine “must,” he was not only a Priest but a Victim. He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. As a Priest, he was humanity’s representative; as a Victim, he was humanity’s substitute. He offered himself as an acceptable sacrifice to God. It is a perfect example of self-surrender and devotion to the divine will, and God accepted the sacrifice not by a man, but by “the Son of Man,” or the human race represented by this Archetypal or Pattern Man. Acting as sin-bearer did not in any way alter his relationship to his heavenly Father. Though Christ was actually the sin-bearer only while on earth, he was the sin-bearer by destiny before he came into the world. Hence, Scripture calls him the “Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.”

No one – not the demons, not his enemies, not even the Apostles – ever called him “the Son of Man.” As “Son of God” applied to himself had a unique meaning, namely, the only begotten Son of the Eternal Father, so had this title, coined by himself and applied to himself alone. No one else ever stood as a representative of the human race. “The Son of God” is a stranger to the human race, because he is its Creator; but the “Son of Man” was one with the human race except for its sin. As man he could die. To die is a humiliation; but to die for others is glorification. His Father, therefore, manifested a singular love to his divine Son by allowing him as the Son of Man to taste death for others. The family tree of earthly ancestors was really not important. What was important was the family tree of the children of God he planted on Calvary.

[This article is adapted from *Life of Christ*, Chapter 23, (c) by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen 1958, published by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, with forward by Fr. Benedict Groeschel. Used with permission.]
Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979) was an American theologian and bishop, first in New York City and then in Rochester, New York. He became well-known for his preaching, especially on television and radio. He hosted the night-time radio program *The Catholic Hour* for twenty years (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting a weekly program called, *Life Is Worth Living*. The show ran from 1951 until 1957, drawing as many as 30 million people on a weekly basis. He wrote 73 books and numerous articles and columns. Mother Theresa of Calcutta always kept a copy of Sheen's book, *Life of Christ*, with her wherever she travelled for daily reflection and meditation.
The Spirit Prepares Us to Receive the Son of God

by Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200 AD)

There is one God, who by his word and wisdom created all things and set them in order. His word is our Lord Jesus Christ, who in this last age became man among men to unite end and beginning, that is, man and God.

The prophets, receiving the gift of prophecy from this same Word, foretold his coming in the flesh, which brought about the union and communion between God and man ordained by the Father. From the beginning the word of God prophesied that God would be seen by men and would live among them on earth; he would speak with his own creation and be present to it, bringing it salvation and being visible to it. He would free us from the hands of all who hate us, that is, form the universal spirit of sin, and enable us to serve him in holiness and justice all our days. Man was to receive the Spirit of God and so to attain to the glory of the Father.
The prophets foretold that God would be seen by men. As the Lord himself says: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.* In his greatness and inexpressible glory no one can see God and live, for the Father is beyond our comprehension. But in his love and generosity and omnipotence he allows even this to those who love him, that is, even to see God, as the prophets foretold. For what is impossible to men is possible to God.

By his own powers man cannot see God; yet God will be seen by men because he wills it. He will be seen by those he chooses, at the time he chooses, and in the way he chooses, for God can do all things. He was seen of old through the Spirit in prophecy; he is seen through the Son by our adoption as his children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven in his own being as the Father. The Spirit prepares man to receive the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father, and the Father, freeing him from change and decay, bestows the eternal life that comes to everyone from seeing God.

As those who see light are in the light sharing its brilliance, so those who see God are in God sharing his glory, and that glory gives them life. To see God is to share in life.

[Excerpt from *Against Heresies*, a treatise by Irenaeus.]

Irenaeus was an important second century church father (130-200 AD). He was born in Smyrna in Asia Minor, where he studied under bishop Polycarp, who in turn had been a disciple of John the Apostle. He studied in Rome under Justin Martyr. Around 178 AD he was made bishop of Lyons in Southern Gaul. In contrast to Justin - whose writings he used and respected - Irenaeus rejected the philosophical approach to Christianity, which for him "rested on revelation, tradition, and on the power of the Holy Spirit." He did not entirely abandon philosophy and many of his works are indebted to it. He saw his main ministry in refuting the heresy of the Gnostic teachers.

Irenaeus is the first great theologian of the early church. His major work, *Against Heresies*, written around 180 AD, was a refutation of Gnostic errors. He exposed the absurdities of the Gnostic cults of the day and included a strong presentation and defense of orthodox belief. His work is the earliest compendium of Christian theology surviving from ancient times and is the first work that cites virtually every book of the Christian writings that we now call the New Testament.
Exalted Over All

by Steve Clark

Therefore God has highly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:9-11

In the vision in the fifth chapter of Revelation when John found himself before the heavenly throne of God, the scroll that would unfold God’s plan for the human race was sealed. He was pointed to the one worthy to open the seal: Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. Christ was worthy because of who he was. But he was also worthy because of what he had done.

The elder said to John, “[He] has conquered, so he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Revelation 5:5). Because he has won a victory, he can fulfill God’s plan. When Christ was given the scroll by God, those in heaven sang a song of praise to him. This was a “new” song, that is, a song to celebrate the new conditions created by Christ’s victory:

Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain and by your blood
did ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and nation
and have made them a kingdom and
priests to our God,
and they shall reign on earth.

- Revelation 5:9-10
The scene itself is striking. The Lion is standing before the throne of God, closer to the divine majesty than the greatest of angelic beings. Apparently he is standing in the heavenly Holy of Holies, at the holiest point in the universe. But the Lion is “a Lamb, standing as though it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6).

The phrase is an odd one: dead lambs do not stand. John seems to mean that although he saw the Lamb standing and therefore alive, it was possible to see that he had been slain. His wounds, the signs of his death, were visible. His standing posture possibly just indicated that he was alive but more probably indicated that he was acting as a priest, because priests stand before God when they serve him. The Lamb, in other words, was standing before God, risen and victorious, but as the one who had died for the sins of the world. He was now in God’s presence as the High Priest, seeking the salvation of the world.

All of this is picture language. The same figure cannot be a Lamb and a Lion. Nor, when we enter heaven, will Christ look at us with seven eyes, as in the next phrase. But in some way that we cannot fully understand, he is and has been and will be in God’s presence as the Priest who was a sacrificial victim and as the King who conquered by being defeated. The visions of the Book of Revelation cannot be drawn without grotesqueness, because they are a fusion of different pictures, all of which have significance. But the details all reveal something about the heavenly fulfillment of the death of Christ on earth.

When did the events in John’s vision occur? Some have thought that the pause between the question and response indicates that John did not at first know what to look for, but Christ was there all along. Others have thought that heaven was opened to him so he could see what had happened when the risen Lord arrived before the throne of his Father. The dialogue with the elder does seem to indicate that the worthy one arrived while John was looking.

In either case, there is agreement that the vision is meant to dramatize the importance of the position Christ attained through the resurrection and ascension. Only after the arrival of the Lamb in heaven can God’s plan for the human race unfold, because only then has the work been accomplished that made it possible. Both aspects are important.

Something has been accomplished on earth: atonement and victory. And the one who did it is now in the place where the events of human history are determined – before the throne of God – presenting what he has done and being given a response by his father in the form of the scroll that unfolds the plan for the victorious conclusion of human history.

John does not record any words of the Lamb. From that some have concluded that Christ did not say anything. He did not need to. His wounds and his risen humanity were enough. He simply needed to present himself in God’s presence since what he had done was well enough known to God. Others have held that he did speak, and the words of his intercession are echoed back to us in the song of praise. Christ certainly interceded, with or without words, since the role of a priest involves intercession on the basis of the sacrifice being offered. The Letter to the Romans says that, “[It is] Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34).

Ascended in the presence of God, Christ must have communicated something like this: “Here I am, Father, having completed the task you sent me to do. I have suffered and died for human beings. I have paid the price. I have given myself completely. Now look upon these wounds, the sign of my life given to you as an offering. Look upon the sacrifice, which I know is acceptable to you, and be gracious to those below. Accept them as well. Forgive them. Cleanse them. Pour out your blessing upon them, the gift of your Holy Spirit. Take them for yourself, holy to you. Free them from their bondage and bring them to yourself. May this offering I have made achieve the result for which it was given.”
In this chapter, we are primarily going to look at the resurrection and ascension of Christ. His death cannot be understood in isolation, no matter how useful it is to focus on it more extensively in order to understand its meaning. Explaining it all by itself is like describing a journey without mentioning the destination, or like saying to a child how good it was to make the last mortgage payment without her realizing that meant her family then owned the house. Christ’s death was only one step in a process, part of a transition from an earthly existence to a heavenly one. His resurrection and ascension completed that transition by bringing him into the heavenly position from which he could be the Redeemer.

The Scriptures describe the resurrection and ascension of the Lord as an exaltation. Both words indicate a going up, one a rising up from a fall, the other a climbing up from a descent. The resurrection and ascension, then, are the conclusion of the process we looked at in the previous chapters. Christ went down; he lowered or humbled himself. But he did so that he might be raised up. Raised on high, the Redeemer could bring about the results his humbling was intended for.

The word “exaltation” in Hebrew idiom is used to refer to a state of power or greatness or rule. A king is high or exalted. Anyone else is lower in rank by comparison. “Exaltation” can also be used to refer to victory. A victor is exalted or set on high, while the defeated opponent is humbled or brought low. But “exaltation” can also refer to going up to heaven because heaven is as high as someone can go.

Christ’s resurrection and ascension were his exaltation in victory to a position of authority and power, his exaltation to a heavenly place. From there he could exercise a heavenly priesthood and a heavenly kingship. Or to put it in another way, Christ was then in the kind of relationship with God that allowed him to bring about the redemption made possible by the sacrifice he offered in humility upon the cross.

The resurrection and the ascension are the conclusion of an exodus. They complete the passage of the Lord himself from a fallen or low state to an exalted or heavenly one. They also make possible our exodus from bondage to spiritual freedom and the enjoyment of our heavenly inheritance. In this chapter, we will look at what the resurrection and ascension resulted in for the Lord. In the next part of this book we will look at what it resulted in for us.
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Exaltation as Priest

Earthly and heavenly
The Letter to the Hebrews gives us an image of Christ’s resurrection:

Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24). As a result, “we have [a perfect] high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord.

- Hebrews 8:1-2

Hebrews tells us that the earthly temple in Jerusalem was made by human beings to be a copy of the true temple (Hebrews 8:5). Israelite workmen were able to make it as a copy because God revealed the “pattern” to Moses. We might say God showed him a model from which a blueprint could be made. The true temple is heaven itself, and the true holy of holies is before the very throne of God.

Christ was not an earthly priest. He would not have been allowed into the court of priests in the earthly temple, much less the earthly holy of holies. Nor would he have been interested in trying to enter. His was a new covenant priesthood rather than an old covenant priesthood, meant to be exercised in a heavenly way rather than an earthly way.

Christ’s death on the cross was an earthly event with heavenly consequences. It happened on earth, because that is where Christ died. The consequences are heavenly because God’s reception of Christ’s death as the payment and atonement for the sins of human beings made the redemption possible. Christ the Priest made the connection between earth and heaven. Yet how that connection happened is not easy to state with accuracy.

Some Christian teachers stress that Christ’s death was a sacrifice completed on earth. Usually they also say that he
was likewise a priest on earth offering his life to the Father on the cross, an earthly altar. Perhaps the strongest support for this view comes from the Gospel of John. At the moment of his death, “knowing that all was now finished” (John 19:28), Christ said, “It is finished” (v. 30). He bowed his head and “gave up his spirit” or, perhaps, “gave over the spirit” (v. 30). Then in an unusual event, blood and water, the two instruments of purification, flowed from his side (v. 34). It seems likely that in these details John is describing the death of Christ on earth as the sacrifice that achieves the redemption of the world through purification from sins and the gift of the Spirit. From this passage among others many Christian teachers have developed the phrase “the finished work of Christ” (on Calvary).

Other Christian teachers speak of the resurrection and ascension of Christ as the completion of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Some of them go so far as to speak of the heavenly sacrifice of Christ. They do not mean that he offered two sacrifices but that the earthly sacrifice was somehow completed in heaven.

They usually base what they say on the Book of Hebrews. They point out that Hebrews says Christ would not be a priest on earth, but that his priestly ministry must be in heaven (Hebrews 8:4). Moreover, he must have had something to offer in heaven if he were to minister as a priest (Hebrews 8:3–4). In addition, Hebrews says he is now appearing in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). They also observe that the High Priest on the Day of Atonement poured out the blood on the altar and then took it into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle it before the earthly throne of God. The Letter to the Hebrews seems to connect this second step with Christ’s ascension into heaven (Hebrews 9:11-12, 24).

Both positions are based on truths and have much to be said for them. To discuss them adequately would go beyond what is possible here. Properly understood, they likely are not, in fact, incompatible with one another. They do, however, certainly stress two different truths. One position stresses that the earthly death of Jesus on the cross was the full satisfaction for the sins of the world. Nothing further was needed to pay for human redemption, nor did he in any way die again or offer another sacrifice. The other position stresses that his death on the cross was only effective as it was presented to God in heaven, and that presentation in some way is the work of the risen Christ as the heavenly High Priest.

Both truths have a place in the full understanding, although it is difficult to find the best way to speak about how they can be combined. Moreover, even if we take the strongest view of the completion of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, there are still many features of the resurrection and ascension that can only be understood as connected to sacrifice and can best be described in sacrificial terms. Three sacrificial terms are especially important: acceptance, intercession, and blessing.

Acceptance

“Acceptance” or “acceptability” translates a Hebrew word commonly used in sacrificial contexts to indicate that someone or something meets with God’s approval. He therefore “accepts” or receives it. In English, to say that someone is “acceptable” to God would be somewhat grudging. It is a word we might use in the process of hiring a new employee to indicate that someone is merely still in the running. The scriptural word is more positive. It indicates that someone or something actually meets with God’s favor or approval and is something he wants.

Both people and sacrifices could be acceptable to God. In fact, sacrifices were intended to make people acceptable to God. Leviticus describes a sacrifice this way: “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord; he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him” (Leviticus 1:3–4).
The result of sacrifice, then, was to make the worshiper accepted by God, established in friendship with him. In order to do that, however, the offering itself had to be accepted by God, and therefore it had to be acceptable to him. This passage mentions three requirements for the acceptance of a sacrifice. It had to be a male animal of the right sort, without blemish, and offered in the tent or temple ordained by God.

Christ himself fulfilled all these requirements for the new covenant. He was the Lamb provided by God, without the blemish of sin, and offered in the true tent of heaven. But because he fulfilled the requirements of sacrifice in an unprecedented way, the acceptance of his offering could not be presumed, as the Israelites in the Old Testament had presumed the acceptance of old covenant sacrifices.

A similar situation of uncertainty occurred when Solomon built the temple to replace the tent of meeting. When it came time to offer sacrifice there, the Israelites needed some attestation of God’s acceptance of the new temple and therefore of sacrifices offered there. Second Chronicles describes what happened: “When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple” (2 Chronicles 7:1).

The fire that consumed the sacrifices and the glory that filled the temple served a similar function. Like the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, they were visible manifestations of the presence of the Lord. The cloud of glory that filled the temple indicated that God accepted the temple and made it his house. The fire that came down upon the sacrifices indicated that God accepted the sacrifices and took them to himself. This special manifestation of God’s action indicated to the people of Israel that the new temple was the place chosen by God as the true holy place where sacrifices could be acceptably offered.

In a similar way, the resurrection of Christ was the manifestation of the acceptance of Christ’s offering. He had been put to death outside the temple. As he lay dead in the tomb, the glory of God came upon Christ in a new way. God’s presence and power filled him the way the cloud filled the temple, entered into him and transformed him as the fire had consumed the offering. By his glorification, Christ’s humanity was taken by God and so became holy in a new way, holy as a sacrificial offering. In fact, as a sin offering it became “most holy” (Leviticus 10:17). At the same time, his humanity was transformed in such a way that it could enter heaven and function in a heavenly mode.

The resurrection and ascension were the heavenly reception of the sacrificial victim. They were either the actual acceptance of the sacrifice or else the manifestation of that acceptance. The sacrificial Lamb was now God’s in a new way, a gift given in sacrifice and received by God. It was therefore manifestly able to make the worshipers for whom it was offered acceptable to God.

**Intercession and blessing**

The next two sacrificial terms, intercession and blessing, are best treated together. Most sacrifices were offered for some benefit the worshipers wished to receive from God. This may not have been true of the burnt offering, which symbolized a complete giving to God with nothing received in return. It was, however, true of the sin and guilt offerings by which Israelite worshipers sought forgiveness for their sins. It was also true of the peace or communion offerings, which were offered as part of a petition for some favor, as a thanksgiving for some favor granted, or simply as a free expression of love to God and desire to strengthen their relationship with him.

The offering of sacrifices involved both intercession and an impartation of a blessing. We have a description from about 200 B.C. of the high priest Simon offering sacrifice in a service. This account concludes by saying,

> And the people besought the Lord Most High in prayer before him who is merciful,
till the order of worship of the Lord was ended;  
so they completed his service.  
Then Simon came down, and lifted up his hands  
over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel,  
to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with his lips,  
and to glory in his name;  
and they bowed down in worship a second time,  
to receive the blessing from the Most High.  

- Sirach 50:19-21

As this passage makes clear, both intercession and blessing were part of the sacrificial ceremony. As the gift was being given to God, intercession was being made. The sacrifice by itself could be considered as intercessory, because the prayers that accompanied the sacrifice only put into words the purpose of the gift. Sacrifice was a way of seeking God’s grace and blessing.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the priest imparted a blessing. Behind this was a conviction that an acceptable sacrifice would bring blessing. Since the priest knew how to offer an acceptable sacrifice, he simply pronounced the closing blessing upon the worshiper, confident that God’s blessing would be given. The verbal blessing expressed the actual blessing that resulted from an acceptable sacrifice that a duly consecrated priest had offered.

Both aspects are present in Christ’s priestly service. As a priest, he makes intercession before God for his people. He is in heaven “now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24). “He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). We will not be condemned by “Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34).

There is, in other words, an ongoing priestly intercession of Christ, and it has our redemption as its object. He intercedes for us that we might be blessed as a result of his sacrificial offering. That offering makes us acceptable to God. His intercession may or may not be verbal, but the very presence of the Lamb who has been slain for us before the heavenly throne of God is itself a presentation of the sacrifice on the cross to the Father. In view of that sacrifice, God is gracious to us.

We should not necessarily think of the intercession of Christ as a set of actions by which he responds to our prayers for particular favors. Every time one of his followers prays, he probably does not get up from his throne, stand before his Father again, and ask his Father to grant the favors being sought. His intercession is rather a single eternal intercession that we be acceptable to God and that we receive forgiveness of our sins and the new life for which his sacrifice was offered. That intercession puts us into a relationship with God that allows us to make petitions for particular favors and be heard by God (John 16:23-24).

As a priest Christ also imparts a blessing. At the end of the Gospel of Luke there is a description of the risen Christ that probably shows his priestly blessing. He had manifested his resurrection by appearing in the midst of his disciples. He then explained the crucifixion and resurrection, concluding with the prediction of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “‘and behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.’ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them” (Luke 24:49-50). It is probably not an accident that Jesus blesses his disciples in a priestly way and does so right after promising the Holy Spirit, since the gift of the Spirit embodies what Christ’s sacrifice was meant to bring.

The Holy Spirit, as Paul says, is the promised blessing (Galatians 3:14). He is the fulfillment of the promise of the
reversal of the fall that had been pledged to Abraham and his faith, because the gift of the Spirit brings about the reversal of the fall in those who receive him (Gal 3:6-14). The Spirit is the source of the new life (2 Corinthians 3:6), the first installment given as a guarantee of the full possession of the heavenly inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-4). He brings the initial presence of the kingdom of God (Romans 8:18-25). The Holy Spirit, in other words, brings all the blessings of the new covenant, given as a result of Christ’s sacrifice.

The Holy Spirit, however, could not be given to the disciples until Christ’s sacrificial gift was presented in heaven through his resurrection and ascension. John said of the situation before Christ’s death, “The Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). Christ’s blessing of his disciples described in Luke 24, then, was the action of the risen Lord. He had probably already ascended initially (John 20:17), and was calling down that gift which would surely be given to his disciples some days later. Christ’s blessing was an action of the High Priest appointed by God, who knew that he had offered an acceptable sacrifice and knew that he was authorized to call the blessing of the Holy Spirit down upon those who belonged to him.

However we state the relationship between the earthly and heavenly aspects of the sacrifice of Christ, his death on the cross is the cause of the blessing and salvation Christ came to bring. The cross on earth was the point of atonement and satisfaction. Sin came into existence on earth and was atoned for on earth. But the change in relationship with God and the consequent change in human lives is heavenly and eternal, because God dwells in heaven and in eternity. Christ makes the connection in his priestly ministry. He is before God, presenting the acceptable sacrifice, the offering of himself, and on that basis interceding for his people. Since his sacrifice is the one God wanted, Christ’s intercession is heard and the blessing of new life is given.

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Exaltation as King

Christ is not only exalted as priest; he is also exalted as king. He is a royal priest who combines in his person both roles. His kingship, like his priesthood, is heavenly. He reigns in heaven in a way that he could not on earth. In his kingdom, under his heavenly rule, is true life and prosperity. His exaltation, then, is also an exaltation to a position...
of effective kingship.

The word “ascension” indicates that Christ’s work was completed by his “going up” to God. The same event can also be described as Christ’s enthronement or his being seated at the right hand of the Father. There is a connection between the two ways of describing what happened to Christ at his ascension, because the royal throne was always the highest seat in the audience hall. The spatial placement expressed the role of the king. Often the seats of others in authority were also elevated, but never higher than the royal throne. In a similar way, the royal palace was placed on Mount Zion – the highest point in Jerusalem, right below the temple, the palace of God. Heaven itself, of course, was also understood to be “on high”, much higher than the highest position on earth.

Peter’s sermon on Pentecost expressed this connection between resurrection and ascension and between ascension and enthronement. In it, he explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the sign of the messianic age. Speaking of Psalm 16 as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ, he said,

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

- Acts 2:32-36

The way Peter passes from Christ’s resurrection to his being seated at the right hand of God indicates that he sees the resurrection and ascension as two aspects of the same event. He then quotes another messianic psalm to indicate that the Messiah, who would die but not be held by death, would ascend to the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110). That in turn would indicate that the crucified one was both Lord and Christ.

The phrase “to sit at God’s right hand” can only be understood in terms of a royal audience. When he holds audience, The King of the Universe takes his seat on the royal throne (Daniel 7:9-10) to govern his realm. After the resurrection, his Son – “one like a son of man” (Daniel 7:13-15) – sits beside him on his right hand, the position of next greatest honor and authority. For the Son to be seated at God’s right hand, then, is to be enthroned as King, King of the Universe. As a result, Christ will share the position of his Father as divine King and reign in union with him, subordinate to him but with divine authority and power.

To say that Christ is the King of the Universe is to say that he is Lord of all. No other authority in the universe is equal in right or power, nor is there any that can withstand him. “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ…made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:17, 20-21). At the same time, to say that he is King indicates that Christ is in a personal relationship with his subjects, especially his loyal subjects. He cares for them in justice, defending the cause of the poor, giving deliverance to the needy, and crushing the oppressor (Psalm 72). In his kingdom is life.

While Christ’s kingship is like an earthly kingship, it is a heavenly kingship, because though human he is the heavenly Son of God. In the resurrection, he was given a new kind of life that allowed his human nature to function in a heavenly way. He was thereby enabled to take a position as human that he had previously held as divine. He “returned” to the glory he had with the Father before the world. But in the process of doing so, that glory had transfigured his humanity in such a way that someone who was human could share the divine throne.
Having someone human on God’s throne does not mean that the universe is ruled by a human being rather than God or ruled in a merely human way. “By nature” Christ was united to his Father, so that not only was his divine nature one in being with the Father, but his human nature was also united with his divine nature in oneness of person, and therefore with the Father’s divine nature. By his self–lowering or humiliation, Christ’s human nature had proved itself fitted for such an exalted position, because it was the human nature of a fully obedient servant, willing even to surrender his own life in great suffering for the sake of doing the will of God (Hebrews 5:8–9). Christ’s human nature was also fully ready for such a position, because it had died and so left behind any of the restrictions that went with sharing in the life of fallen humanity. As a result, that human nature was now glorified – a perfect expression or image of the divine nature, no longer weak but strong with divine power or glory.

When Christ reigns with God the Father, therefore, the Father does not have to share his glory with any other (Isaiah 42:8; 45: 20-25). Not only is the Son fully united with his Father so that they share the same glory of their natures, but also his humanity is that of a servant, fully set on the glory of his master, transfigured so as to be a fully responsive instrument of divine action and reflection of divine glory. God, in short, can speak and act in and through the humanity of Christ without any diminishment of his glory. Therefore Christ reigns to the glory of his Father (Philippians 2:11).

The victory of the Redeemer

The enthronement of Christ is the true victory. It was not a victory in the sense of winning a combat. That happened when Christ, the obedient servant, resisted the temptations of fear, pain, and disgrace to successfully lay down his life in humility and humiliation. That also happened when Christ – the Son of God in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) – gave up that flesh to death, so that in dying he might trample down death.

Humiliation, however, led to exaltation. Dying led to rising again in new life. Christ’s enthronement was victory in the sense of taking possession of the battlefield and the kingdom. As Satan, sin, and death lay defeated, God’s kingdom was proclaimed and Christ began to reign. He was exalted in victory to a position of rule. “To this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:9).

As a man on earth, Christ went about preaching and teaching, healing and casting out demons. As he did so, people gained considerable freedom. Christ was therefore Redeemer during his earthly ministry. Nonetheless, he was not able to be the Redeemer in a full way until after his resurrection. As millions of people would come to believe in Christ, we have only to imagine long lines of people waiting for his personal attention to realize the impracticality of an earthly ministry as the main means of our redemption.

More seriously, even though Christ’s earthly ministry brought many individuals into contact with divine power and healing, the gates of paradise were still closed, the banishment from the garden was still in effect, and the condemnation of Adam still stood. Therefore, the full blessing could not be given. Christ could not do for people all that he came to do until he had completed his priestly work by giving his life as a sacrifice for sin and presenting that sacrifice to his Father. For that he needed to be a heavenly priest.

Likewise, Christ could not reign as king on earth. The title belonged to him. As Son of David he was the rightful King of Israel, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38). Even more, as the divine Son of God, he was the natural Lord “of all” the whole human race and all the angelic beings as well. Nonetheless, the usurper who was ruling as prince of this world and holding its inhabitants captive had not yet been judged and cast out (John 12:31; 16:11). Nor had Christ been enthroned and given the position that was his by right.

All that changed with the resurrection and ascension. The Messiah entered into his glory, and could do so because he had suffered (Luke 24:26). He had paid the price, taken upon himself the curse, and offered the sacrifice (Luke 23:39).
Christ had done what was needed to make available the fullness of redemption, blessing, and heavenly access. There was no longer anything to prevent him from fully taking away the sins of those who came to him and imparting to them the new life. As Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11), Jesus could be the Redeemer of the human race.

This description, however, is still too external to provide a full picture. In the process of taking his new position, Christ himself had changed. He was glorified or transfigured by the power of God. As a result, the fullness of redemption was in him because the new, redeemed life was his completely. Christ had been fully united to God in oneness of being. But he was now united to God in a new way in his human nature. As a result, the power and life of God filled his human nature and so glorified it. Christ now was a glorified human being, one who not only had a more direct access to God’s heavenly presence but who also was able to transmit God’s life and power more freely and directly.

The Person of the Redeemer

At the beginning of this chapter, we looked at the vision of Christ as the Lamb standing before God as Priest and sitting on the throne as King. That was the prelude to what the royal Lamb would do in bringing human history to its fulfillment and accomplishing the complete victory. The Book of Revelation continues on to unfold the “war of the Lamb”.

Those visions are preceded by letters in which the risen and ascended Lord speaks to the seven churches who represent the whole church of the redeemed and who are living on the battlefield. Those letters are introduced by a different vision of the Lord – the Lord in the midst of his people, the Lord as he is now.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

- Revelation 1:12-18

John saw the Lord glorified, standing in the middle of the seven golden lampstands that represent the seven churches that stand in the true temple of God, the people of the new covenant (Exodus 37:17–24). He saw, in other words, the presence of the Lord on earth now, in the middle of his people. The same Lord who is with God in his heavenly throne room is also on earth in the middle of his people, bringing the heavenly presence and reign and blessing into their lives. In his person, he unites heaven and earth.

The Lord appeared as “one like a son of man,” as a human being. This phrase is taken from Daniel 7 and indicates
the heavenly man who was given kingship over the earth (Daniel 7:13; Matthew 27:64). He was clothed in priestly garments, appearing as priest as well as king. His hair was like the hair of the ancient of days (Daniel 7:9), a symbol that indicates that the glory of the Father was present in him as the incarnate Son. His appearance was angelic, like the powerful heavenly messenger who came to Daniel (Daniel 10:6) – a vision so fearful that Daniel was overcome, as John himself was.

The Lord announced himself to John as the eternal one, the first and the last who had entered into time to die. He now is eternally alive, but not because he is divine. He is alive in a human nature that has died and come to life (Revelations 2:8) so that it can die no more. Because of his victory Christ now has the keys to death and Hades, opening the place of the dead to give new life to those who come to him and sharing with them his victory and his throne (Revelation 3:20-21).

The redemption is not simply an event. It is a person. It is the Lord who has himself gone through the exodus of the human race, and so contains in his own person the fullness of redeemed humanity. Christ is the incarnate one, but the incarnation was not simply intended to be the bare union of divinity and humanity in one person. The incarnation was intended to be the means to the transformation of humanity into a glorified state. As a result, the life, goodness, and power of God would be manifested in human nature. In the person of the Redeemer, humanity is divinized in the sense of “made godlike.” Redemption began with the transfiguration or transformation of the Redeemer. He is now in the midst of his people, able to share with them what he himself has become.
Icon of the Second Coming of Christ (detail) by Heather MacKean, St. Andrew's Orthodox Church

The Two Comings of Christ

by Thomas Hopko

The two comings of Christ are held together in Christian thought, action, and prayer at all times

Jesus was born in order to die. Indeed, of all humans who ever lived on earth, God's Son is the only one who entered the world for this purpose. He came to die so that we might live in and through him. The eternal life which he brings to the world is already present and active in those who receive him, but it will be manifested fully and completely in a way which no one can question, doubt, or resist only at the end of the ages.

Christians are those who remember and celebrate the fact that God has visited his people in the person of his Son in order to be crucified and raised. And so they are also those who await his Coming, believing that all of God's promises made in and through Jesus will be actualized in the age to come. Therefore they expect nothing here. They want nothing here. They know that they will get nothing here. Their Savior's promise for this age is only persecution and tribulation.

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and
living bulwark

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." (John 15:18-20)

"The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16-33)

Christians live between the two comings of Christ. They remember his first coming to be sacrificed. They anticipate his second coming to reign. This is vividly portrayed in traditional Orthodox church buildings where the "royal gates" of the icon screen in front of the altar table are flanked by the icons of the Theotokos and Child on the one side, and the Lord Jesus in glory on the other. To the uninitiated it may seem as though these are simply pictures of Mary and Jesus put on the same level. This is not so. The icons which frame the Orthodox altar are images of the two comings of Christ.

Mary is not alone in her icon; she is holding the Christ child, who is not shown as a baby, but as the Son of God incarnate "in the form of a slave ... in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). This is the icon of Christ's first coming. And the icon on the right of the doors is not a picture of Jesus as he was on the earth. It is his image in glory as King and Lord, the icon of his second coming.

The two comings of Christ are held together in Christian thought, action, and prayer at all times. They cannot be separated. When they are, it is the end of Christian faith, life and worship. The first coming without the second is a meaningless tragedy. The second coming without the first is an absurd impossibility. Jesus is born to bring God's kingdom. He dies to prove his kingship. He rises to establish his reign. He comes again in glory to share it with his people. In the kingdom of God there are no subjects. All rule with the risen Messiah. He came, and is coming, for this purpose alone.

You have taken me captive with longing for You, O Christ,
And have transformed me with Your divine love.
Burn up my sins with the fire of Your Spirit
And count me worthy to take my fill of delight in You
That dancing with joy, I may magnify Your two Comings 3

3 This is a pre-Communion prayer in some Orthodox prayer books (e.g., see A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers [London: SPCK, 1945] p. 77 [republished in 1984 by Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York]). It was written by Saint John of Damascus and is originally found in the second canon for matins of the feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, ode 9, troparion 3.

[This article is excerpted from The Winter Pascha: Readings for the Christmas-Epiphany Season, by Thomas Hopko, © 1984 by St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York 10707. All rights reserved. Used with permission.]
Prisoners of Hope: Reflections for Advent

“We Christians must be prisoners of hope, held captive to hope, never to be held by despair”

by Dave Quintana

For many years now, I have been sending a Christmas letter recounting a bit of the past year as well as some thoughts on how I have experienced God working through it all. Many people have responded encouragingly over the years, saying that they greatly look forward to hearing from me and that I should write more. A similar thing happened a number of years ago when I shared some writings about a one-month mini-sabbatical that I took working with the poor in the Philippines. So, what you have before you is their fault! It is also the result of me getting a bit more reflective in my old age, and growing in my desire to attempt to share the riches of God’s dealings with me. [excerpt from the Introduction to Daily Meds from the Q Source Book]
We just recently celebrated American Thanksgiving [a national holiday in the U.S.] – man do I love Thanksgiving! A day or two is dedicated to the task of setting the finest of culinary delicacies before you – turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, green beans, corn, cranberry sauce, rolls, etc. … and all drowning in a super-sized portion of gravy! And all followed by multitudinous home-baked pies! Wow! Anyway, from my perspective, the season of Advent is like that. Heaven, hope, God as King, Jesus coming again, going home, the full establishment of God’s kingdom, everything finding its “yes” in him – the “Advent Banquet” is a season that we set aside to give our hearts and our minds, and indeed our entire lives more fully to the life-giving, spirit-sustaining truths of our faith. This is a season of preparation, of watching and waiting for the coming King. We prepare for the celebration of the Incarnation (Christmas), but we especially long for his second coming at the end of the age as we live in this “in between” time. So with a feast like this set before you – dig in!

*Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

Revelations 21:1-4 NIV translation

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**The King and his Kingdom**

We focus during this season on the King and his kingdom. We know that with Jesus’ invasion of this earth 2000+ years ago that the kingdom has come – but we also know that it is also clear that it is not yet present fully. So we Christians, we believers in this Jesus who came once and will come again, long for the full establishment of his reign. And we long for the day for righteousness to be established and for wickedness to be cut off. The King will come in righteousness to judge and to make war – and that will be a good thing, a very good thing. In his kingdom he will reign sovereignly, all will bow before him, and his will alone will be done. Lord, let your kingdom come! And let your will be done – in all the earth and in all my life!

*Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory.*
**Watching, Waiting and All That Jazz**

I will always remember waking early on Christmas mornings, eager to walk down the stairs to see what wonders lurked under the Christmas tree. And I can think of many a fishing outing sitting for hours on end, keenly attentive to the taught line, looking for the first indication that a fish was yielding to the temptation of the lovely bait I had skillfully placed before it. And I remember those grueling neighborhood football games, poised as a linebacker, awaiting the proper moment to drill my enemy (I mean opponent) into the ground. Advent is a season of watching, of waiting, of meditating on what it means for us as Christians to be prepared. If the Lord is in fact coming again, well then let me humbly suggest we best be prepared. Scripture exhorts us in many places to be alert, to not fall asleep, to not be caught “left out”. Are you ready for the Lord’s return? If he were to come again would he find you asleep? Or perhaps nodding off? Or just a good bit drowsy? Are you watching and waiting, expectant of his imminent return?

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:45-51 NIV

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**An Anchor for Your Soul**

I don’t know how one could survive without hope. It seems to me that despair is one of the saddest of conditions (though I suppose hoping in the wrong thing might be even worse). Now, I’m not talking about vain hope – “hope” that in actual fact is just “wishing”, or “really wanting” something to be the case. I’m talking about Christian hope, the hope of Christ. The hope of Christ coming again, of God fulfilling his promises, of God’s kingdom being fully and finally established. I am talking about placing your trust in a sure and certain promise – about hope as an “anchor for your soul” anchoring us to heaven itself (where Christ our hope has gone ahead and where he prepares a place for us). We Christians must be prisoners of hope, held captive to hope, never to be held by despair. We live therefore in confident expectation of a hope that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. May we set our hope more fully on God and his coming kingdom during this season, and may this hope be as a weapon in our hand, fending off any despair or doubt that would ever array itself against us!

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Hebrews 6:19-20 NIV

Dave Quintana is an elder of the [Servants of the Word](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/december2012p5.htm), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He is also a
Daily Meds from the Q Source
By Dave Quintana, published by Tabor House, 2012, 250 pages, $11.00

Dave Quintana's daily meditations and Bible readings to stir our minds and kindle our hearts in 2013. He explores themes important to all who search to be wise men and women in the Lord, and provides a wealth of personal experience from living and ministering in Central America, Asia, Europe, and the United States. Expect to be challenged. Expect to be inspired. Expect to meet the living and loving God. Order one for yourself and more to give as gifts!
**The House of David**

A Scriptural Reflection

by Jeanne Kun

"Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." – 2 Samuel 7:16

"It is the Son of the Most High alone who is the key of David that shuts and no man opens, and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge."

– Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Adventu Domini* 1, 1-10

**Reflecting on the Word**

Before God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, he intimated that evil would ultimately be defeated by the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). This was the first hint of how God would restore humankind to full union with him. True to his promise, over time he revealed his plan of salvation to the people he called his own.

First the Lord made a covenant with the patriarch Abraham and promised to make him the father of a nation through whom all the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3; 15:7-12, 17-19; 17:1-8). This promise extended beyond Abraham to his offspring "throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (17:7).

When Abraham’s descendants had become slaves in Egypt, God delivered them. Then he made a covenant on Sinai with Moses and the Israelites, bringing them into a special relationship with him as his chosen people (Exodus 19:5-6; 24:7-8). Later, when they asked for a king to rule them, the Lord appointed Saul to the task (1 Samuel 9:15-17; 10:1). After Saul’s disobedience (15:1-23), the shepherd David, the youngest son of Jesse, was anointed king over Israel.
Anointing with oil—that is, pouring oil from a horn or vessel on the head of one to be made king—was a symbolic act that consecrated the person to God’s service. Priests (Exodus 30:30), prophets (1 Kings 19:16), and even holy objects such as altars, vessels, and lampstands (Exodus 30:26-29) could also be anointed with oil to indicate that they, too, were consecrated to God. “Messiah”—mashiach in Hebrew, and christos in Greek—literally means the “anointed one,” and the title “the Lord’s anointed” originally referred to the king who ruled over God’s people.

When King David had secured peace within his kingdom and with the surrounding nations (2 Samuel 7:1), he desired to honor God by building a “house” for him in Jerusalem. In the ancient world a god was truly established when he had a fitting home. The temple that David decided to build for the Lord was to replace the tent that had sheltered the ark of the covenant since the days at Sinai (7:2, 6); he also intended it to be a place of worship, where praise and sacrifices would be offered to God.

Instead of affirming David’s plan, God surprised him by revealing a much grander plan. Through the prophet Nathan, God told King David that he was not to construct a dwelling place for him. Rather, God intended to build a “house” for David, that is, a dynasty that would rule over his people. The Lord declared to David that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne, thus promising to establish David’s house for all time: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:16). Notice the word play and variety of meanings for the word “house” as God spoke to David through Nathan: palace, (7:1), dwelling (7: 2, 5, 6, 7), temple (7:13), and royal dynasty (7:11, 16).

This promise to David amplified the covenants with Abraham and with Israel at Sinai. God did not expect or require anything of David in return for the promise; it was a grant made freely to King David and his descendants, not a treaty that stipulated obligations.

Solomon succeeded to his father David’s throne, but...
soon after his death, Israel and Judah, which had been united as one kingdom under David, broke apart. The monarchy was plagued with strife and began to decline under Solomon’s son, King Rehoboam, and his heirs. Two centuries later (around 722 B.C.) Israel was vanquished by Assyria, and Judah was made Assyria’s vassal. In 587 the Babylonians wiped out Judah, destroying the temple, burning Jerusalem, and sending many of the city’s inhabitants into exile. Yet memories of the brilliant days of David’s reign lived on in God’s chosen people.

Despite the failings of the kings of Israel, Judah, and his chosen people, God did not retract his promises to them. Instead, he continued to love them steadfastly and to unfold his plan for salvation through the prophets that he sent to them. As Benedictine monk and Scripture scholar Damasus Winzen noted, “Through all the human confusion of defeat and victory, of treachery and loyalty, of disappointments and triumph, we can hear—if we have ears to listen—the quiet steps of God’s fatherly love pursuing the path of redemption” (Pathways in Scripture).

The Jewish people recalled the promises God had made to King David, promises of an eternal dynasty and of a kingdom that would last forever. Faced with the disasters and sins of the monarchy that unfolded after the reign of David, they came to hope that these promises would be fulfilled by a future “hero-king.” This anointed leader or “Messiah” would be descended from David, a conqueror who would throw off the oppressor’s yoke, restore the kingdom, and establish perfect justice. Jewish expectations were focused on the “David” of the future—a figure who would revive and carry on the glorious reign of David forever.

Many of the Old Testament psalms—among them, Psalms 2, 45, 89, 100, and 110—have royal and messianic overtones. Several are quoted in the New Testament as prophecies about Jesus, who fulfilled Israel’s hopes and yearnings for the rule of one who would truly be God’s anointed king and Messiah. Psalm 89 in particular recounts God’s dealings with Israel and joyously celebrates the absolute and unconditional promise that God made to establish David’s dynasty. Although David and his descendants

18Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in thy eyes, O Lord God; thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and hast shown me future generations, O Lord God! And what more can David say to thee? For thou knowest thy servant, O Lord God! Because of thy promise, and according to thy own heart, thou hast wrought all this greatness, to make thy servant know it. Therefore thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee, and there is no God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. . . . And now, O Lord God, thou art God, and thy words are true, and thou hast promised this good thing to thy servant; now therefore may it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee; for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken, and with thy blessing shall the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.”

The Scene
Psalm 89:19-21, 27-37

19 Of old you did speak in a vision to your faithful one, and say:
“I have set the crown upon one who is mighty,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
20 I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
21 so that my hand shall ever abide with him,
my arm also shall strengthen him.
27 And I will make him the first-born,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
28 My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
29 I will establish his line for ever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.
30 If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my ordinances,
31 if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
32 then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges;
33 but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,

failed to keep God’s commands and were to be justly punished as a consequence (Psalm 89:31-33), God nevertheless declared,

"I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure for ever." (89:34-36)

However, in events that seemed to belie God’s word, Israel fell into disgrace at the hands of a foreign nation; her king was brought down, and it appeared that David’s line had been cut off (Psalm 89:38-45). How could Israel reconcile this destruction with God’s promises? The situation required that God’s promise to David be understood in a new sense—as a description of an ideal king who would one day inherit David’s throne.

Psalm 89 ends with a great cry wrenched from the heart of a disappointed yet hopeful people (89:46-52). In anguish, the psalmist implores God to remember his promise and restore his people by sending a righteous king to reign over them again:

"Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you did swear to David?" (89:49)

The people of Israel were mistaken in their understanding and expectation of a political ruler, yet their faith would finally be vindicated: God would answer their pleas not by restoring the ancient monarchy but by raising up, in the words of one hymn writer, “great David’s greater son.” A descendant of David would in the end rule as king over all.

When the prophet Samuel anointed David as king of Israel, the Spirit of God “came mightily” upon him (1 Samuel 16:13). This is a prefiguration of the baptism of Jesus, the “Christ,” God’s anointed one (Matthew 3:16). The Jerusalem Catecheses, a catechetical work of the early church, explains,
Christ bathed in the river Jordan, imparting to its waters the fragrance of his divinity, and when he came up from them the Holy Spirit descended upon him... Christ’s anointing was not by human hands, nor was it with ordinary oil. On the contrary, having destined him to be the Savior of the whole world, the Father himself anointed him with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately following his account of Jesus’ baptism, John the Evangelist records the first proclamation of Jesus’ messianic identity: “[Andrew] first found his brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ)” (John 1:41). Ultimately, God’s promise to David and Israel’s hopes would be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Serve him. Do you find it difficult to accept God’s right to call you and use you in whatever way he chooses? If so, why?

2. By promising to build a “house” for David—a dynasty that would rule over his people—God blessed David in a way that far exceeded his expectations. How have you seen God bless and honor you in undeserved and unexpected ways?

3. When your experience and circumstances seem to contradict the promises of God, how do you respond? What might you do to grow in a deeper trust in God and a clearer understanding of his word?

4. God used the prophet Nathan to speak to David. Whom has God used to speak his word to you? What impact did this have on you? Have you ever felt called to speak God’s word to another person? What happened when you obeyed God?

5. In what ways do you experience Jesus’ kingship and authority over your life? How do you express honor for him as your king?

6. Write a prayer to praise God and acknowledge some of the ways that he has shown his faithfulness and steadfast love to you. You may find it helpful to model your prayer on David’s (2 Samuel 7:18-22, 28-29).

Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior women’s leader in the Word of Life Community, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Excerpt from God’s Promises Fulfilled, The Word Among Us Press, Copyright © 2006. All rights reserved. Used with permission.
Under the old covenant, God commissioned anointed kings to rule over Israel and Judah. David—whose dynasty God promised to establish forever—was Israel’s greatest king, the model and prototype for all future kings. Under the new covenant, God commissioned the Lord Jesus, his own Son as well as a descendant of David, as his anointed king. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,” Jesus announced as he took up the mission entrusted to him by the Father (Mark 1:15).

We commonly understand a kingdom to be a territory or country ruled by a king. However, when Jesus spoke of the “kingdom of God,” he was not referring to a piece of land, but to the rule of God. Thus, the “kingdom” that Jesus proclaimed in the gospels is better understood as the reign or the kingship and authority exercised by God over his people.

Jesus’ ministry and deeds reflect the way in which he would...
rule as king. His teachings help us understand the nature of his kingdom: “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Mark 10:15); “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Jesus also unfolded the truths and mysteries of the kingdom through his parables: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened” (Matthew 13:33); “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field” (13:44).

At the end of the ages, Jesus will come again to establish the full reign of God over the human race—and then we will hear “loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever’” (Revelation 11:15)! Read and prayerfully reflect on these additional Scripture passages to enhance your understanding of Jesus’ kingship and of the kingdom of God:

Jesus said:] “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

(Mark 4:30-32)

I [John] heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!”

(Revelation 5:13)
A Broken Man and a Broken City

by Martin Jordan

It amazes me to think that I have been in Detroit serving with YouthWorks Detroit for almost half a year now. Yet what amazes me more is recalling the numerous ways in which I have seen God at work in this city. This sign of hope which I have seen here stirs in me a personal hope of what God is about in my life as well.

I came here with some prior knowledge of Detroit. I felt like I knew the city because I knew many people who had come here before. My brother Andy’s life was changed by coming here (see Andy's story) and I had been warned that going to Detroit with the mindset of changing the city was the wrong approach. I never thought I was going to change it but I remained a proud man nonetheless.

Even as I look over the previous paragraph I notice the number of times I talk about myself and what I can do. I don’t think that’s what the Christian life is about. The Lord calls for less of ourselves and more of him. There’s a famous Christian song that says, “If our God is for us, then who could ever stop us.” This verse comes from Romans 8, and it’s true to the extent that we are on the same side of the battlefield as our Lord Jesus Christ. I tend to take the approach that we should be for God rather than God being for us. The truth is he is our strength and we are not his strength. He chooses to manifest his strength in us if we cooperate with him.

I don’t have any real strength in myself. If my actions are a projection of my own character then my character is very flawed. The only reason for my character being flawed is that my heart is hard. I sin. I miss the mark, or rather, I hit the wrong mark. Yet in the face of my weaknesses I’ve seen the Lord use me when I’m open to him. Why? Because he wants my heart and he wants his city back. In Psalm 37 it says “delight yourself in the
Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” What I desire is to be more like Christ. I think Detroit desires the same. Perhaps we are not delighted enough in the Lord yet. He wants more.

The motto of the city of Detroit is “Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus”. This means “We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes.” Ash is not attractive. It is dirty and leaves a mark on anything that comes into contact with it. What is attractive about ash is the thing which it once was and the thing it has the potential to be. When ash re-enters the earth it returns nutrients to the ground and makes it more fertile. Life springs up and beauty is given a chance to be perceived. We see beauty and we hope for beauty because that beauty is a reflection of God’s own glory.

I feel in some way that my own fate is tied to the fate of my beloved city. If I cannot rise from the ashes that I have created for myself then how can I hope for my city to rise from its own ashes? God never wanted a stupid, broken Scottish boy to come over and add to the problem. What he wanted was that stupid, broken Scottish boy to take on his character and show that to his people. As Christians I believe that we are called to be a sign of this “hope for better things.” If I can’t do that then what’s the point in me being here? If I do not rely on God then I am not capable of working with youth; I’m not capable of working with the homeless; I’m not capable of being the light that the Lord intends me to be. I have nothing and the Lord has everything. So if a broken man and a broken city can let the Lord abide in them, then I believe that they will truly grow, mature, and have everything they need.

Martin Jordan, 21, hails from Glasgow, Scotland, loves piano, football, and philosophy, and will finish his honors college degree once he completes his Standing in the Gap year and returns to University. Martin is the third

brother from his family to serve significant time in Detroit, and is a bold and faithful witness to the good news about Jesus to the youth in Detroit.

And shine solace to those in the night
We will hope
We will hope
For better things

*poem by Martin Jordan*
Personal Encounters

by Finja Schmidt

Koinonia is an ecumenical Christian university student group based in central London, UK. Members are from different Christian traditions: Anglicans, Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox and Protestants. Koinonia aims at being an intentional community where Christian faith comes alive, whether it be through prayer, conversations, growth in Christian life or time spent together. One of Koinonia's five essential elements is 'profound encounters'. Finja Schmidt, a 2nd year student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, and a Koinonia student missionary, shares her experience of a personal encounter with God.

Some of the highlights of my involvement in Koinonia this past year, times that brought me closer to God and closer to my friends, were moments of what we in Koinonia-lingo call 'profound encounters'.

During a Koinonia retreat last year, while I was praying about my struggle to live my faith authentically among the mates I live with, I felt a strange prompting from God to open my Bible to "page 333" - which turned out to be a passage from 2nd Chronicles, chapters 19 & 20. These words from 2nd Chronicles fit my situation exactly:

"...we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you... For the battle is not yours but God's... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions, stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid: do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you"

The following day, I had the chance to invite my flat mates to attend church with me - and to my surprise they came! When I shared about this incident afterwards at a Koinonia prayer meeting, Mark (our Koinonia Director) told me that he and some of the other Koinonia leaders had received the same word of encouragement from the Lord for this year of service in Koinonia. Their sense from the Lord made me feel
like God had really confirmed my place in the greater mission of Koinonia.

Last February I traveled to Dublin for the Kairos Weekend (Kairos is the international student network that Koinonia is part of). I again encountered God in a very personal way, but this time it was when we decided to go out into the streets of Dublin to pray for the homeless. I had a chance to chat with a homeless man and then pray with him. After our team had gathered in the pub, some of us were inspired to go out once again into the city and do more of the same witnessing. We prayed together before heading back out and again someone flipped open the Bible to a passage that fit our situation exactly. We had really good conversations with the homeless who were often very resonant to praying with us. The feeling of working together on a mission for God completely changing the way I see the homeless, and it left me falling into the rickety youth hostel bed that night at 4 am with a huge grin on my face.

Profound encounters are moments that stretch my understanding of who God is and what he is capable of doing in and through me. ‘Profound’ goes beyond superficiality, describes an encounter that is meaningful and leaves you changed. Instead of speaking and learning about God, he speaks directly to me. A real ‘encounter’ is more than a fleeting interaction over facebook, it is really taking the time to see someone as they are and to engage with them. It is moments like these that have changed my relationship with God and with others.
Learning to Love

by Thomas Ryan

Life for me right now is about re-learning to love and trust. I believe that there is always room for growing in love. And we can grow in love for the rest of our lives. At this particular time of my life I am trying to regain something I once had, or at least reach a certain standard of love which used to be present in my life. My time here with the people involved with YouthWorks-Detroit has helped me regain this mindset of love.

I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota in a household where the only thing that was more important to me than my siblings and myself was our relationship with God. Every morning we started the day off with, “Lord, thank you for this new day. Help me to be obedient, kind, and respectful and to always tell the truth.” These words echo in my head every day I spend in Detroit. My family isn’t perfect (Whose is?), but we love one another. We fight and argue – I am quite good at it (ask my parents if you aren’t convinced) – but we really do love each other. At the end of day we all know that God has blessed us as a family.

My last three years at home disrupted this environment of love as I took on a selfish mindset of pity for myself as well as the thought that I could struggle on my own without God or my parents or anyone else. I found myself in many a dark spot but my parents were persistent in their love for me – and I know it’s cliché but I wouldn’t be anywhere, especially here in a good Christian environment, without them. One night after a big argument with my dad as we sat in the living room, he mentioned that he knew I was destined for great things. What he said that night really hit me, and as I spend more and more time in Detroit these words are motivating and have even more meaning to me.
During my time of service in Detroit the Lord has been showing me many things. The most important I feel is trusting in him and serving with steadfast love. It’s not always easy, obviously, but I have learned to do it. Due to the struggles and challenges that serving in Detroit entails, I realize that the only way I can make it through each day is to recognize my own helplessness and my need for God and the desire to love which he puts into my heart. Through this admittance of helplessness God has given me grace to continue to have a desire to serve and to rely on God for everything in my life. I can’t exactly tell you what I am going to do next month, next year, or the rest of my life, but I do know that God will show me the way and make his will known.

[Thomas Ryan, 19, is from St. Paul, Minnesota. He is serving in Detroit with the Kairos-North America Standing in the Gap program. Thomas first served in Detroit through a one-week urban encounter during the summer of 2010, and God brought him back for a second stint of serving in Detroit. Thomas loves jesting (banter), social situations, living with those unique individuals known as the Servants of the Word, and has an as yet unrealized gift for teaching.]
God's Amazing Work:

Breaking language barriers and building bonds of Christian fellowship across borders

by Stephen Bick

One mild Friday lunchtime in October, a group of five young men and women set out from Lansing, Michigan to visit and build up our fellow UCO chapter in Montreal, Canada. We were a strange group: Greg, staff worker for University Christian Outreach (UCO) in Lansing, committed, driven and (very) Lebanese; Stephanie, University of Michigan nursing student, excited, smiley, French-American; Rachel, UCO Ann Arbor staff worker, amicable, perseverant, Scottish, often seen with camera; Clare, UCO Ann Arbor staff worker, sensible, joyful, leading the group, the only American-born member; Stephen (myself), 19, Kairos gapper from London.
We drove from Lansing to Toronto that afternoon, a pleasant journey full of great conversation and views out of the window. We stayed in Toronto with the Barakats, a Lebanese family who Greg knew very well. Leaving early the next morning, I had a long car journey to reflect on why I was asked to come on the trip. What could I, a non-French speaker, offer? I prayed that God would use me in spite of all this, knowing him to be much greater than I am. We arrived in Montreal at the Dahan’s, another Lebanese family who, like the Barakats, were members of the People of God community in Lebanon before moving to Canada. We celebrated the Lord’s Day with the entire UCO chapter. Stephanie and I gave our testimonies in French (mine was pre-translated for me). Sunday, after attending church services, was almost entirely spent eating, at a brunch that led into dinner, all wonderful Lebanese food and fellowship. This was a great time to get to know the folks in the chapter, and talk about their UCO and the challenges they were facing, and to offer encouragement and advice.

Michel Dahan, who returned from his gap year in Lansing (one alarmingly similar to mine!) to found UCO Montreal, showed us around Montreal with his fiancee, Katia. In the evening we went to the UCO men’s sharing group, where Greg and I gave our testimonies, this time, thankfully in English. The guys were very
inspired by this, and all spoke promisingly about their dreams for the chapter and where they wanted it to go in the future.

Leaving very early Tuesday morning, we travelled the entire distance back to Lansing in one day, about 14 hours of driving. Stopping for lunch at Niagara falls, I was reminded of my reaction to the falls aged 3: I apparently walked around for 40 minutes repeatedly saying “It’s amazing. It’s amazing”. Now, thinking on how God used me throughout the trip, breaking language barriers, giving me words to speak and ears to listen and keeping bonds of fellowship intact in confined vehicles, I have a very similar response to his work in me today as I did to that staggering waterfall sixteen years ago.

[Stephen Bick, 19, grew up in the Antioch Community in London, England. He is currently doing a Kairos GAP year of service in Lansing, Michigan, USA – frequently with Windex and rag in hand.]
Serving the Dying of Kolkata and Being Filled with God’s Blessing

by Marc Barbara

This past August I went to India for two weeks to serve the poor and the homeless with the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Theresa of Calcutta. I was joined with my older sister (21 years old), my older cousin (21 years old) and my friend (21 years old). We traveled from Lebanon to Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta) in West Bengal. Kolkata is one of the poorest cities in the world. The Missionaries of Charity welcome a continuous stream of volunteers who come to offer their help. I discovered that volunteers don't even have to sign up or call to be part of their program. You give your name as soon as you get there. The sisters have so many people to care for that they can't do their work of mercy without the help of volunteers from around the world. There are many poor and sick people in need and very few sisters to care for them. Every volunteer really makes a huge difference, and the sisters are more than happy and thankful for each new volunteer who offers their service.
After our plane arrived in Kolkalta we took a taxi to the hotel, and then started working the very next morning. We went to the Mother House where the Missionaries of Charity live, gave them our names, and then chose one of their centers we wanted to serve in. In Kolkata they have a center for the sick people, a center for the mentally ill, a center for the physically handicapped, and a center for the people who are dying. I volunteered to help at the center for the dying people.

We worked every day in the center from 7 am to 12 pm. I chose the job least chosen by most volunteers; washing people’s clothes by hand, feeding those who were dying, and even showering them. Most of the dying can't walk, so I would carry them from their beds to the bathrooms. Most of the other volunteers couldn't stand to see the people I was working with because of their misery and the poor state of their bodies. Four people I worked with died during my stay.

I joined the sisters every morning at 5:30 am in their Mother House chapel where they prayed the psalms together and received the Eucharist at their daily Mass. Without this time of daily prayer with the sisters and being filled with God's blessing for the day, I would have had no energy or motivation to volunteer. Just before going to work, we used to sing a small prayer all together which the sisters taught us: "We have our hope in Jesus that all things will be well in the Lord." There was also a prayer and meditation time in the Mother House every afternoon at 5 pm. It was a calm and peaceful environment during that time, a good time to forget everything around us and concentrate on being alone with God.

I heard a saying that Calcutta [Kolkata] is an attack on the five senses. The smell on the streets is very bad, you
can't touch anything because it is so dirty, the people and the condition in which they live in can be disturbing. You barely find good food that won't make you sick, and you always hear the sound of heavy traffic – a lot of cars and honking horns. Kolkata is a really disturbing city, and I found the first days there very hard because I didn't know anyone or anything about the local culture. I expected it to be tough, but when I got there it was much worse than I could have ever imagined. After a few days passed by, I got used to it. The weather for me was the worst combination ever – very hot and humid with heavy rain.

Every morning I used to spray my whole body with insect repellant to prevent mosquito bites. I underwent all the vaccines necessary before the trip and took malaria pills before, during and after the trip. I found Kolkata to be a safe city, even at night. So there is nothing to worry about except the food you eat and the water you drink. We always drank imported bottled water (not tap water) and found a few restaurants that were safe to eat in. Transportation is easy there; there are a lot of taxis, and streets are named and numbered. Everything in India is really cheap as well.

Serving the poor in Kolkata can be a very hard and tough experience – I don’t think everyone who would like to volunteer can survive it. The work is very tiring, but once you get used to it, it is a great and rewarding experience. This experience has taught me a lot. First, I learned a new culture I didn’t know before. Second, I now better realize how blessed and fortunate I am and how much I really have compared to those who lack so much here. Third, I learned how to adapt to a new style of living there (walk from place to place, use public transportation, helping people and learning from them, as well as being able to teach and encourage them...). Fourth, I was able to meet people from many cultures around the world. We became friends with volunteers from Italy, Japan, and America... We also got to go out to lunch and dinner in our free times. We were all there for the same reason: to help and love the way Mother Theresa did, to make a little change in people's lives and give them some hope to go on.

If anyone reading my testimony has any interest in serving with the Missionaries of Charity, I would encourage you to go even if it is only for a week. There isn't much tourism you can do there, but it won't be boring. And you will be blessed and inspired, as I was, with the opportunity to serve and be blessed by the Missionaries of Charity and the people they care for.

[Marc Barbara is from the People of God community in Lebanon, where he serves with the youth program and is an active member of University Christian Outreach. He is completing his bachelor's degree in business at the American University of Beirut.]
From Father to Son: Things My Dad Taught Me About Life

by Ted Kennedy III

3. The Debtor Who Wouldn't Go Away

All kids love to hear stories about their ancestors, and Dad was excellent at telling them. One of the most memorable characters in the cast of my ancestors was Christopher Columbus Boles, whom we knew as “Granddad”. We were in a bank one day, and Dad commented that he knew the manager, and had gotten to know him better in an odd way.

The manager had come up to Dad one day and said, “Say, I met your grandfather last week.” My Dad acknowledged it, a bit puzzled by its significance, and went on to other topics, but the man would not be deterred. “No, I mean I really found out what he was like.”

The manager went on to recount how one of his tellers had come to him saying: “There’s an old man here who says he owes us money. He says he couldn't pay some of his bills from the depression, but he wants to pay them back now.” The
manager told the teller that those debts had been written off many years ago, and instructed him to thank the man and to
tell him that he didn’t owe the money any more.

The teller retorted, “I already told him all that, but he insists that he pay us back… with interest.”

The manager went down and met Granddad, and I believe he took the money from him. As he recounted the story to my
Dad, and as my Dad recounted it to me, the desire grew in me to be a man like C.C. Boles – a man who is honest in all
dealings with others, and who values honor and a good name more than wealth or personal gain.

What a great legacy to leave to your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren… For C.C. Boles, it was worth a lot
more than the money he paid back to the bank.
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Ted Kennedy is a member of the Servants of the Word, an
ecuminal brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He
is steward and trainer for the Servants of the Word
international formation house in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.
Ted is a vice president at Service Brands International, a
franchising company headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Click on links below to read separate stories

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Story 1 Trust Your Strengths and Know Your Limits
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4. Waiting to Honor

I'm not sure how old I was at the time, but the scene is still vivid in my mind. Dad was sitting in the car, with Mom in the front passenger seat. We were all headed somewhere, and Mom and Dad were waiting for us. Several of us kids piled out of the house and jumped in the back seat.

Before backing out of the driveway, Dad turned around and pointed his finger at us and said in that certain "don't mess with Dad" tone of voice: "I don't want your mother to ever wait for you again. If she is taking you someplace, I want you to always be the ones waiting for her."

He wasn't particularly angry, but that tone of voice still echoes in my ears... and I don't think Mom ever did wait for me again – at least when things were under my control.

The lesson I learned that day was that waiting is one of the best ways to honor someone. In life, someone is always waiting for someone else. Dad taught me to honor others by being the one that waits. Over the years I have tried to wait not only for my Mom, but for everyone. I tried to be early to meetings, early to school, early to everything. If someone had to wait, I wanted it to be me.

Waiting can be a frustrating experience, but my Dad's lesson turned that frustration completely around. When I wait for people now, I say to myself: "this is my chance to honor this person."

So Dad, I still try to be the one waiting for others (especially Mom). I bet when you said those words you had no idea what an impact they would have.
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Who Needs a Life of Purpose?

by Sam Williamson

Ten years ago, I was on a plane heading for New York to give a presentation. The man next to me was a professor of public speaking at a major university.

Somewhat sheepishly, I asked for advice, “What is the key to great public speaking?”

After some preliminary comments, he said this: “At the beginning of World War II, when Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of England, he said, ‘I felt as though my whole life had prepared me for this moment.’”

“Sam,” he continued, “the best public speakers feel as though their entire lives have prepared them for this moment.”

His words pierced me more deeply than had any other past comment or deliberate insult.

I was devastated. I didn’t feel prepared for anything of significance.

Why?

My soul longs – and I believe every soul longs – for a purpose, for a deep meaning, to know that we matter. We long for something transcendent.
Yet I believe most of us fritter our lives away with little dreams. We eagerly await our next vacation or our next car. We squander our money – or our dreams – on the next new iPhone or matching shoes and purse.

We numb our hearts with nonsense.

I know I had. At the time of this airplane conversation, I was an executive at a software company. My disposable income allowed me ski trips out west and a large addition to my house. But it didn’t satisfy, and this conversation bared my soul naked to the inconsequential elements of a frivolous life.

Yes, I was a believer. I did believe Christ had died for me; I did pray; I did give money to the poor; I did serve. But somehow I wasn’t living the life designed for me. There was something in the universe I longed for but didn’t have.

**The greatest sin**

A short while after my devastating airplane conversation, I read a quote by Dorothy Sayers,

> In hell it is called Discouragement and Despair; the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive merely because there is nothing for which it will die.

The quote did nothing to quiet my soul. I was haunted by the phrase, “[it] remains alive merely because there is nothing for which it will die.”

Yet this haunting awakened something. An inner compelling began to drive me. I wanted to live for something, even if I had to die for it.

**The image of God**

Early in scripture, God says, “Let us make man in our image after our likeness (Gen 1:26); and then – as if to reinforce through repetition – the next verse continues, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.”

God is all glorious. The word “glory” means weightiness, significance, splendor, and matter. To be made in God’s image means we matter; that we were designed for lives of significance, glory and nobility.

**And destiny**

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, he made them comrades in creation. He gave them a garden to nurture and a world to manage. In essence, God said to Adam and Eve, “I’ve brought you into creation at just the right moment, to use your creativity and skills to nurture life and order to the creation I made.”

Likewise, God gives us purpose and destiny. He brought us into the world for this moment. It is no accident that he made us male or female, that we live in the twenty-first century (instead of the seventeenth), that we live in our cities with our families and gifts and talents.
He brought us here – and now – for a purpose. The world has needs that only we can supply. There is something only we can do.

**Comradeship**

Oswald Chambers said,

> It cannot be stated definitely what the call of God is to, because His call is to be in comradeship with Himself for His own purposes, and the test is to believe that God knows what He is after.

For some unfathomable reason, God has chosen to work through us. He could have done everything without us; instead he ennobles us to work with him, in comradeship with him, to bring his life and light to the world.

For some unfathomable reason, God calls us his friends, to share in his purpose, to be partners and comrades in an ultimate mission.

That is why we are here; and the test is to believe God knows what he is after.

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish Antioch, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men’s retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. His is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.
The depiction of the Lord Jesus Christ in art goes back as early as the second century AD. One of the earliest known images, depicted in numerous 2nd century paintings and sculpture, is the figure of the Good Shepherd with a lamb around his shoulders, representing Christ's care for those he has saved (see photo below on the right).

In the 3rd and 4th centuries, more varied images of Christ and scenes from the New Testament Gospels appear, as well as scenes from the Old Testament. Depictions of Christians at prayer with raised hands and the Agape feast also appear at this period. The use of icons in homes and churches became widespread in the 4th and 5th centuries.

The iconoclast wars, first among Eastern Christians in the 8th century and later during the Reformation in the
Living Bulwark

West, centered on the Old Testament prohibition of graven images (Exodus 20:4). Christians have argued for and against images of Christ ever since. The fact of the Incarnation – God becoming man and taking on human flesh – has inspired artists throughout the centuries to recount the Gospel accounts of Christ as well as other biblical stories throughout the Old and New Testaments.

**Icon of Christ Pantocrator (Ruler of All)**

“Christ Pantocrator” is one of the earliest surviving icons of Jesus Christ (see top photo on right). It dates from the early 500s (6th century AD) and is housed in the church at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt. The Greek word *pantocrator* means “ruler of all.” The icon is painted with colored beeswax applied with spatula (encaustic technique) onto a wooden panel and measures 84 cm by 45.5 cm.

In the icon image, Christ is robed in a purple tunic, a color which signifies royalty. He is holding a copy of the Gospels in his left hand while his right hand is raised in blessing. The icon depicts Jesus Christ as both Ruler of all, thus our Judge, and as Savior of the world who brings us the Gospel, the good news of salvation and life-giving Word of God.

The eyes are asymmetrical, most likely to contrast the two natures of Christ as both *human* and *divine* – and to depict on the one hand the Judge who *sees all* (nothing remains hidden to him), and at the same time he is the Savior who *looks upon us* with *mercy*.
The face painted on the icon was most likely copied from the *Image of Edessa* (also called the *Myron* or *Holy Mandylion*), a rectangular piece of cloth with an image of the face of Christ on it, kept in the Greek city of Odessa in the 4th century, but has subsequently been lost. It was believed to be the rectangular piece of cloth that covered the face of Jesus for his burial. The facial image on the Shroud of Turin, which is believed to be the full burial shroud of Jesus, also matches the image of the face of Christ in the icon.
David: Prototype of Christ

by Damasus Winzen

The youngest among his brothers, David was called from shepherding his father’s flock on Bethlehem’s fields to be anointed by Samuel. “And the Spirit of the Lord seized upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:11-13)...

David is the figure of the messianic king of whom Isaiah says: “A shoot shall spring from the stump of Jesse [David’s father, 1 Samuel 16:1], and a sprout from his root will bear fruit, and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him” (Isaiah 11:1). This prophecy found its fulfillment in the Son of David whom the Spirit descended upon as a dove . . . (Matthew 3:17).

There are many other traits in the life of young David which show him to be the prototype of Christ, especially his fight with Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Faith and spirit had left the Israelites and their king Saul. They did not dare to answer the giant’s blasphemies. Then David jumped into the breach, without armor, a true soldier of his God, knowing that “not with sword or spear does the Lord deliver, for the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Samuel 17:47).
17:47). With a sling, a stone and a stick, David overcomes all the most up-to-date might of Goliath (17:5). Who would not be reminded of Christ, the one who jumped into the breach to give his life for the whole people and conquered the power of Satan with the cross on his shoulder?

Another beautiful sign of the love of Christ prefigured in the life of young David is the friendship between him and Jonathan (1 Samuel, chapters 18–20). Jonathan, who as a son of Saul was heir to the kingdom, prefers to be excommunicated by his father rather than to give up David, “whom he loved as his own life” (18:3). He takes off his royal cloak, his sword, his bow and his girdle and gives them to David. By this act he renounces his natural right to the throne in favor of David. He entrusts his own life and that of his family completely to the good graces of his friend: “O may you, if I am still alive, O may you show me the kindness of the Lord!” (20:14). In doing this he represents that portion of Israel which at the time of Christ will prefer to be banned by their own people rather than leave the Son of David, who through his incarnation had received the royal garment of Israel. It was this Jonathan-group among the Jews, the apostles, to whom Christ revealed the secret of his friendship: “Greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends” (John 15:13-14). The friendship between David and Jonathan was fulfilled in Christ who did more for his friends than David ever did. He laid down his life for them.

David’s friendship with Jonathan marks the beginning of those long years of trial which make him still more a figure of Christ (1 Samuel, chapters 21–29). The desert becomes David’s refuge. Abandoned by all, without arms, without food, he receives from the priest the holy bread of the Lord, which was always kept in the sanctuary (21:3-6), and the sword of Goliath which also had been preserved in the tabernacle. At every turn God shows that David is his anointed one, the man according to his heart. David himself could not have given better witness to the love of God working in his heart than he did by answering Saul’s incessant persecution by sparing his life (24:6; 26:9). . . .

David himself was the “Christ,” the “anointed one” of the Lord (Psalm 132:17). His name—David, the beloved one (see Matthew 3:17)—his birthplace Bethlehem (see Luke 2:11), his youth as a shepherd (1 Samuel 17:34-37), his beauty (16:12): really everything in his life foreshadows the Messiah. He won the hearts of his fellow-countrymen through his kindness, and the bond thus established between him and his people points to the new covenant of love between Christ and his Church. Indeed, what the tribes of Israel said to David the day he was proclaimed their king: “We are bones of your bones and flesh of your flesh” (2 Samuel 5:1), gives us the first inkling of the great mystery of the mystical body of Christ which St. Paul was later to reveal. David’s wars and victories have also a messianic character. “It is God that girds me with strength, that teaches my hands to war” (Psalm 18:32, 34). It is God that lights David’s candle in darkness, by whom he leaps over the wall (Psalm 18:28). His victories are anticipations of the great victory which the “Son of David” won at his resurrection. The “sure mercies of David” of which Isaiah speaks (55:3) are fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of David, who did not see corruption, because God raised him from the dead (Acts 13:34-37).

[This article is excerpted from Pathways in Scripture: A book-by-book guide to the spiritual riches of the Bible, by Damasus Winzen. The Pathways in Holy Scripture was written in the late 1940s when Father Winzen was chaplain to the Benedictine nuns of Regina Laudis Monastery in Connecticut. They were printed one by one, following the liturgical seasons, and distributed to subscribers. The book was brought up to date and republished in 1976 by Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan. A new edition was published in 2003 by Saint Anthony Messenger Press & Franciscan Communications for the The St. Paul Center Studies in Biblical Theology and Spirituality.]
Fr. Damasus Winzen, OSB (1901-1971), became a Benedictine monk at the German Abbey of Maria Laach, one of the first centers of Catholic liturgical renewal. He came to the United States before World War II to escape Nazi persecution. In 1951 he founded Mount Savior Monastery near Elmira, New York. He lived there until his death in 1971. A monk and scholar, Winzen served as associate editor of Orate Fratres and editor of *Pathways in Holy Scripture*. He was a prime mover in the organization of the Benedictine Liturgical Conference (later known as the National Liturgical Conference).
Glory Cry the Angel Choirs

by Ed Conlin

Click to listen to an MP3 audio clip

St. Athanasius' Christmas Eve homily (4th century bishop of Alexandria, Egypt and author of The Incarnation of the Word of God) is replete with imagery expressing the unfathomable truth that God became man so that man could partake in the life of God. “God on earth and man in heaven”...a phrase Steve Clark [see The Real Meaning of Christmas] has often spoken, is the inspiration for the song Glory Cry the Angel Choirs. What no man could even have hoped for, dreamed of, or ever accomplished has been wondrously given to us. As the gift, so the cost. Christ emptied himself, so must we. The gift we could never gain, we will never lose...the cost: “only all, only love, priceless love all loves surpassing.”

This song culminates with the scriptural titles for the Messiah sung in the O Antiphons during the last week of Advent. Watching for God is like stepping into a dark room. One sees dimly at first, but as one remains steadfast and peers into the darkness, one's eyes begin to see. So may it be for us this advent season. May we see him whose very presence draws the cry “glory”! from the angel choirs.
Lyrics to *Glory Cry the Angel Choirs* [and audio clip of song]

What no man could hope for now conceived.
Earth is raised to heaven on this eve.
God on earth and man in heaven,
Who can such a wonder fathom?

*Glory cry the angel choirs,*
*Glory fills creation’s song!*
*Hope of heart's most pure desires,*
*Unto us the Lord God is born.*

Sprung from Jesse's root the promised Son,
Hope of prophets, our desired one.
Key of David, Star of Light,
Man is raised to heaven's height.
Rejoice for our Emmanuel is come!

*Glory cry the angel choirs,*
*Glory fills creation’s song!*
*Hope of heart's most pure desires,*
*Unto us the Lord God is born.*

Word of God made flesh in perfect love.
Man made son of God to reign above.
God descends in mortal flesh,
Man is clothed in holiness;
The child is born to set the nations free!

*Glory cry the angel choirs,*
*Glory fills creation's song!*
*Hope of heart's most pure desires,*
*Unto us the Lord God is born.*

[The song *Glory Cry the Angel Choirs* is included in a Music CD entitled, *Taken by Love*, produced by *In His Presence*. The CD and sheet music can be ordered from *Tabor House* or from *In His Presence*.]

Ed Conlin is a member of the *Servants of the Word*, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He lives in community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, and works as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain with the Capuchin Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.
And He Lived Among Us

by Jeanne Therese Hilario Andres

Nine months, she had waited.

Nine months, a mere flicker in time compared to the entire history of a waiting world. An old, weary world suffering the darkness of sin and separation from its Creator. An anxious, self-destructive world which desired, whether knowingly or not, that which it had never seen, but had only dreamed of — light and salvation. A tired, wounded, waiting world.

But it wasn’t just the world which waited. On the other side of the chasm, a loving Father waited, too. How much he wanted to cross this gulf of sin and scoop up his long-estranged children in his arms! How fervently he yearned to care for them, to reveal himself to them, to wipe away every tear that had fallen from their eyes, to hold them in his arms and let them know that he loves them, has always loved them, and always will. Relentless, changeless, ageless, the Father waited on the brink, His tender gaze never leaving his children, ready to bridge the abyss that separated them from his love.

The Father waited. The angels waited. Heaven and earth waited. The whole universe waited. Indeed, mankind was never alone in hoping and waiting for this divine birth that would split history in two.

Now, Mary was sure, it was time. The babe inside her womb knew it was time, and her body miraculously set in motion the intensifying waves of contractions to usher in the birth of this bundle of pure light, of perfect
With each tightening, with each push, came a heightened longing to see, touch and hold the child she had carried inside her. For nine months, she had fed him with her own body’s food, nourished him, shared the same bloodstream. For nine months, he had been hidden inside the warmth and protection of her womb. Now, very soon, her baby would no longer be sheltered in its blessed hiding place, but would at last be one with the world it had come to save. Very soon, the wait would be over. Very soon, the chasm would be bridged. Very soon, all the ends of the earth would see the saving power of God.

A final push, and as creation holds its breath, the Son of God is born. The silence of the night is pierced by his first lungful of air, His first cry. Mary holds him in her trembling arms, speaks his name, and as she looks into his eyes, He becomes silent, seeking the familiar voice he has known from the womb, gazing for the first time at the face he has loved forever. His eyes meet hers, and unable to contain her joy, Jesus’ young mother softly begins to cry. As her tears fall, Mary praises God in her heart for this beautiful child, born to save mankind, entrusted to her for a little while. Joseph dries Mary’s damp cheeks and celebrates quietly, marveling at the wonder of this birth. The angels rejoice! The universe exults! One can almost picture the Father, still standing at the brink of the narrowing chasm, dancing, laughing, wiping away his own tears, saying, “At last, at last, my children, I am with you once more.”

Advent was not just about us waiting for the birth of Jesus; the Lord himself has been waiting for this moment. The moment when he is, at long last, one with his people. The moment when his children will recognize him, know him, and love him back. The moment when we will realize how much we mean to him, and how much he has given up to save us.

This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we hear these words: “The Word was made flesh, and lived among us.” Right now, at this moment, what does this truth mean to you? How does this affect the way you live your life? The choices you make? When you feel alone, alienated, separated from the love of God, reflecting on these words can remind you that by being born as one of us, by living as one of us, by taking on our humanity, Jesus forever tore down the barrier between you and him. When you feel worthless and insignificant, this truth reminds you of how valuable you are in God’s eyes, that for Jesus, you are worth saving, you are worth coming down to earth for, as a tiny, helpless baby.

Dear Jesus, I want to thank you for coming down to earth to save me. When you chose to be born as a man, you made it possible for me to be reconciled with the Father. You have shared in my humanity in all ways except the darkness of sin, and thus, you can feel how I feel, you know my limitations, you understand my heart. On your birthday, Lord Jesus, help me to offer my life, my heart, my choices to you, my Savior. As we celebrate your birth, may I always remember that you came down from heaven out of love for me. Help me to love you back, Lord, with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. Amen.

[Jeanne Therese Hilario Andres (or Nette, as she is more commonly known) is a member of the Antioch Community in London, England, and formerly of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community in Manila, Philippines. She has written for Christian magazines and devotionals in the Philippines, where she also worked full-time in Christ's Youth in Action. She has recently submitted her doctoral dissertation in chemical engineering, and currently lives in Cambridge, England with her husband, Roberto, and their two sons.]