

FIRST LESSON: Rev. Judy Arnold
A Reading from Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

SECOND LESSON: Trevor Mahoney
A Reading from Isaiah 11:1-2, 6-7, 9

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

THIRD LESSON: Debbie Johnston

A Reading from Mary Oliver: *Making the House Ready for the Lord*

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice –it is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances –but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And I still believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

FOURTH LESSON: Naomi Burhans

A Reading from Luke 1:31-35, 38

The angel said to her, “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

FIFTH LESSON: Rev. Will Burhans
A Reading from Jan Richardson: *Gabriel's Annunciation*

For a moment
I hesitated
on the threshold.
For the space
of a breath
I paused,
unwilling to disturb
her last ordinary moment,
knowing that the next step
would cleave her life:
that this day
would slice her story
in two,
dividing all the days before
from all the ones
to come.

The artists would later
depict the scene:
Mary dazzled
by the archangel,
her head bowed
in humble assent,
awed by the messenger
who condescended
to leave paradise
to bestow such an honor
upon a woman, and mortal.
Yet I tell you
it was I who was dazzled,
I who found myself agape
when I came upon her—
reading, at the loom, in the kitchen,
I cannot now recall;
only that the woman before me—
blessed and full of grace
long before I called her so—
shimmered with how completely
she inhabited herself,
inhabited the space around her,

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inhabited the moment
that hung between us.

I wanted to save her
from what I had been sent
to say.

Yet when the time came,
when I had stammered
the invitation
(history would not record
the sweat on my brow,
the pounding of my heart;
would not note
that I said
Do not be afraid
to myself as much as
to her)
it was she
who saved me—
her first deliverance—
her *Let it be*
not just declaration
to the Divine
but a word of solace,
of soothing,
of benediction

for the angel
in the doorway
who would hesitate
one last time—
just for the space
of a breath
torn from his chest—
before wrenching himself away
from her radiant consent,
her beautiful and
awful *yes*.

SIXTH LESSON: Steve Rohall
A Reading from Luke 2:1, 3-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

SEVENTH LESSON: Hannah Lauterwasser
A Reading from Luke 2:8-16

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

EIGHTH LESSON: Linda Alexander

A Reading from e.e. cummings: *from spiralling ecstatically this*

from spiralling ecstatically this

proud nowhere of earth's most prodigious night
blossoms a newborn babe: around him, eyes
-gifted with every keener appetite
than mere unmiracle can quite appease-
humbly in their imagined bodies kneel
(over time space doom dream while floats the whole

perhapsless mystery of paradise)

mind without soul may blast some universe
to might have been, and stop ten thousand stars
but not one heartbeat of this child; nor shall
even prevail a million questionings
against the silence of his mother's smile

-whose only secret all creation sings

NINTH LESSON: Rev. Judy Arnold

A Reading from John 1: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the

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flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Rev. Will Burhans

Having heard the Christmas story through scripture, poetry and song, we pray now, O God, that such visions, such ideals, such values might have their bearing upon this world and compel us towards participation in making it on earth as it is in your heaven.

We pray that the people who walk in darkness, who flee fearful and hungry, as refugees will some day see the light of hope and home again and that in the meantime those of us with resources well beyond what we need will support and shelter them.

We pray that a spirit of wisdom and understanding will be upon our public leaders, that they will find it in their hearts to make decisions based upon the needs of the meek and vulnerable among us and whether they do or don't, that we will raise our voices and take a stand on behalf of the powerless.

We pray for the wisdom, courage, and strength to make our house ready for you, by tending to the earth instead of polluting it, by restoring the land instead of consuming it, by purifying the air instead of poisoning it.

We pray that your favor will continue to rest upon the peacemakers, to reward and multiply their efforts while your judgment continues to move strong against men of violence and greed, to chasten and minimize their efforts.

We pray that Your Truth will come to break our dishonesty; that Your Light will come to shine through our ignorance; that Your Justice will come to disturb our complacency, Your peace will come and end our warfare, and that your wisdom will come and challenge our certainties.

All of this we pray because it is what the story of your birth teaches us to pray and it's the response to your birth that is required of us. Encourage us not shrink into a domesticated, saccharine-Christmas but to rise towards the deeper and more compelling truths that this season and this story and your life ask of us... in Jesus name, amen.