

Blessings from the leadership team to our friends and family far and near during this season of Advent!

Our retreat time together as a Covenant Community this December will focus on the familiar Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Here are some of the content we will share. You are welcome to print this material ahead of our time together.

As we check in on Monday, you are invited to share your answer to the following statement:

"If I were an ornament on a Christmas tree, I would be a _____, because _____."



The Great O Antiphons

Prophetic Expectations of the Coming One: Jesus the Messiah

'Antiphon' – a verse sung before and after a canticle such as *The Magnificat* which is always sung in the ancient office of Vespers.

These seven antiphons are prayers addressed to Jesus in the vocative case ('O') using seven of his messianic titles from the prophecy of Isaiah. As such they are examples also of 'typology' in understanding the facets of the coming Messiah.

The pattern of each is invocation to Christ and then the petition beginning with the word *veni* – come.

Emmanuel (God is with us)
Rex Gentium (King)
Oriens (Morning Star)
Clavis David (Key of David)
Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)
Adonai (Lord)
Sapientia (Wisdom)

The Western Church has used them since 6th Century during the last week of Advent, 17-23 December, the Octave before the Great Vigil of Christmas Eve, the Golden Nights.

The Season of Advent has disappeared from much Western secular life. There is no anticipation, only satisfaction – the 'Holiday Season'. The Church lives in two worlds held in tension during Advent – secular world of Feasting and the sacred world of prayerful waiting and anticipation.

Antiphons give a thought to hold while you sing utterly familiar words – Magnificat... They help shape the interpretation of what is to follow.

Advent is more a season of preparation and anticipation than of penitence (40days) like Lent. So the the antiphons were also used as the 'Alleluia' (forbidden in Lent) introduction to the daily Gospel reading at the Mass. Read backwards they form the acrostic '*Ero cras*' – Tomorrow I will be, or I come. [Or with mediaeval 8th antiphon, '*Vero cras*' – Truly tomorrow. I think this was a deliberate Benedictine conceit but many think it was just coincidence and the antiphons have often appeared in different orders – and with additional ones.

The traditional four Sunday themes are Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. There is not only an anticipation of the birth of Jesus, but of his Second Coming 'to be our judge'.

Title:	Meaning:	Old Testament prophetic verses:
Sapientia	Wisdom	<p>Isaiah 11:2-3 And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears.</p> <p>Isaiah 28:29 This also is come forth from the Lord God of hosts, to make his counsel wonderful, and magnify justice.</p>
Adonai	Lord of Israel	<p>Isaiah 11:4-5 But he shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity the meek of the earth: and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins.</p> <p>Isaiah 33:22 For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king: he will save us.</p>
Radix Jesse	<p>Root of Jesse</p> <p>Jesse was Father of King David and the son of Obed and the grandson of Ruth and of Boaz</p>	<p>Isaiah 11:1, 10 And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. In that day the root of Jesse, who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious.</p> <p>Micah 5:1 Now shalt thou be laid waste, O daughter of the robber: they have laid siege against us, with a rod shall they strike the cheek of the judge of Israel.</p> <p>Romans 15:8-13 For I say that Christ Jesus was minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. But that the Gentiles are to glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: Therefore will I confess to thee, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and will sing to thy name. And again he saith: Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again: Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and magnify him, all ye people. And again Isaiah saith: There shall be a root of Jesse; and he that shall rise up to rule the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost.</p> <p>Revelation 5:1-5 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, a book written within and without, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel, proclaiming with a loud voice: Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man was able, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth, to open the book, nor to look on it. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open the book, nor to see it. And one of the ancients said to me: Weep not; behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.</p>
Clavis David	Key of David	<p>Isaiah 22:22 And I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder: and he shall open, and none shall shut: and he shall shut, and none shall open.</p> <p>Isaiah 9:6 For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.</p>
Oriens	Radiant Dawn, Dayspring	<p>Isaiah 9:2 The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen.</p>

		<p>Malachi 4:1-3 For behold the day shall come kindled as a furnace: and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall set them on fire, saith the Lord of hosts, it shall not leave them root, nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings: and you shall go forth, and shall leap like calves of the herd. And you shall tread down the wicked when they shall be ashes under the sole of your feet in the day that I do this, saith the Lord of hosts.</p> <p>2 Peter 1:19: "Keep your attention closely fixed on it, as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place, until the first streaks of dawn appear and the morning star rises in your heart".</p>
Rex Gentium	King of all Nations, King of the Gentiles	<p>Isaiah 9:7 His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace: he shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom; to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and for ever: the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.</p> <p>Isaiah 2:4 And he shall judge the Gentiles, and rebuke many people: and they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they be exercised any more to war.</p>
Emmanuel	God with us	<p>Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel.</p>
[Virgo Virginum]	[Virgin of Virgins]	

To Explore

Must the performance have a denouement?
Or many little climaxes?

The facets and types of Jesus are all part of a whole – the Triune God.

What are the central themes?

Can we go with many themes?+

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: **Come** and teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: **Come** and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: **Come** and deliver us, and delay no longer.

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: **Come** and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: **Come** and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: **Come** and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.

O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: **Come** and save us, O Lord our God.

Common Worship

***O Sapientia**, quae ex ore Altissimi prodisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: **veni** ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.*

***O Adonai**, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: **veni** ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.*

***O Radix Jesse**, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem Gentes deprecabuntur: **veni** ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.*

***O Clavis David**, et sceptrum domus Israel; qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit: **veni**, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.*

***O Oriens**, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: **veni**, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.*

***O Rex Gentium**, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: **veni**, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.*

***O Emmanuel**, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio Gentium, et Salvator earum: **veni** ad salvandum nos, Domine, Deus noster.*

Breviarium Romanum

Visio Divina – The Practice of Sacred Seeing

The practice of Visio Divina (Latin for divine seeing) is a prayer practice that creates space to listen and pay attention to the Holy in our lives. Based on the 6th century monastic practice of Lectio Divina where the object of prayer is a passage of scripture, Visio Divina allows the Spirit to speak through images.

Prepare: Take a few moments to get ready. Find a comfortable position where you can gaze at the photograph. Settle into God’s presence by connecting with your breath. Move your awareness from your head into your heart. Know that God can be known through many different forms and images. Be present. Be open.

Eyes to See: Allow your eyes to gaze gently on your image. Let them sweep the whole of the picture. Notice the shapes and the colours. Notice the lines and the details. Look for symbols. Notice if there is a place on the image where your eye is invited to linger. Are you called back again and again to a certain detail or colour? Try not to think about it too much. Simply notice where your energy is drawn. Notice where your eye is avoiding or passing over. What part inspires you? Where do you experience resistance?

Slowly become aware of the place on the image that is just for you today. It might be a colour, a shape, or a tiny detail. Linger here. Be open and present to this.

Open Heart: Take a second longer look. Open your imagination. As you reflect on your place on the image, what feelings or longings are evoked? What memories or hopes are stirred? Make room within your heart for whatever wants to emerge.

Be here. Be present. Let go of judging or critiquing. Simply be, lingering here, opening your heart to whatever wants to rise.

Respond: Slowly begin to notice what being revealed in your seeing and through what you are feeling. What is the invitation in this moment of your life? In the day-to-day life you are living what is God calling you to do or be? What insights have you gained? What invitation is growing in you? What work would you like to do today?

Enjoy: Let go. Rest. Enjoy a few moments of stillness in this space.

You may want to spend time reflecting on your experience or in your journal.

— From Janice MacLean – The Prayer Bench – www.prayerbench.ca

Visio Divina invites the viewer into “divine seeing.” Visio Divina shares roots with the ancient practice of Lectio Divina which calls for a slow, careful interaction with scripture through meditation and prayer, allowing a word or phrase to rise in one’s consciousness, a holy word to be savored and examined. Similarly, Visio Divina invites one to encounter the divine through

images. A prayerful consideration of and interaction with a photograph in a magazine, icon, piece of art, or other visual representation allows the viewer to experience the divine in a unique and powerful way.

Try Visio Divina

1. Pick out an image..., a photograph, painting, or icon.
2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
3. Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
4. Consider the following questions:
 - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
 - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
 - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.
 - Now, offer your prayers to God in a final time of silence.

By Beth Richardson, August 15, 2012





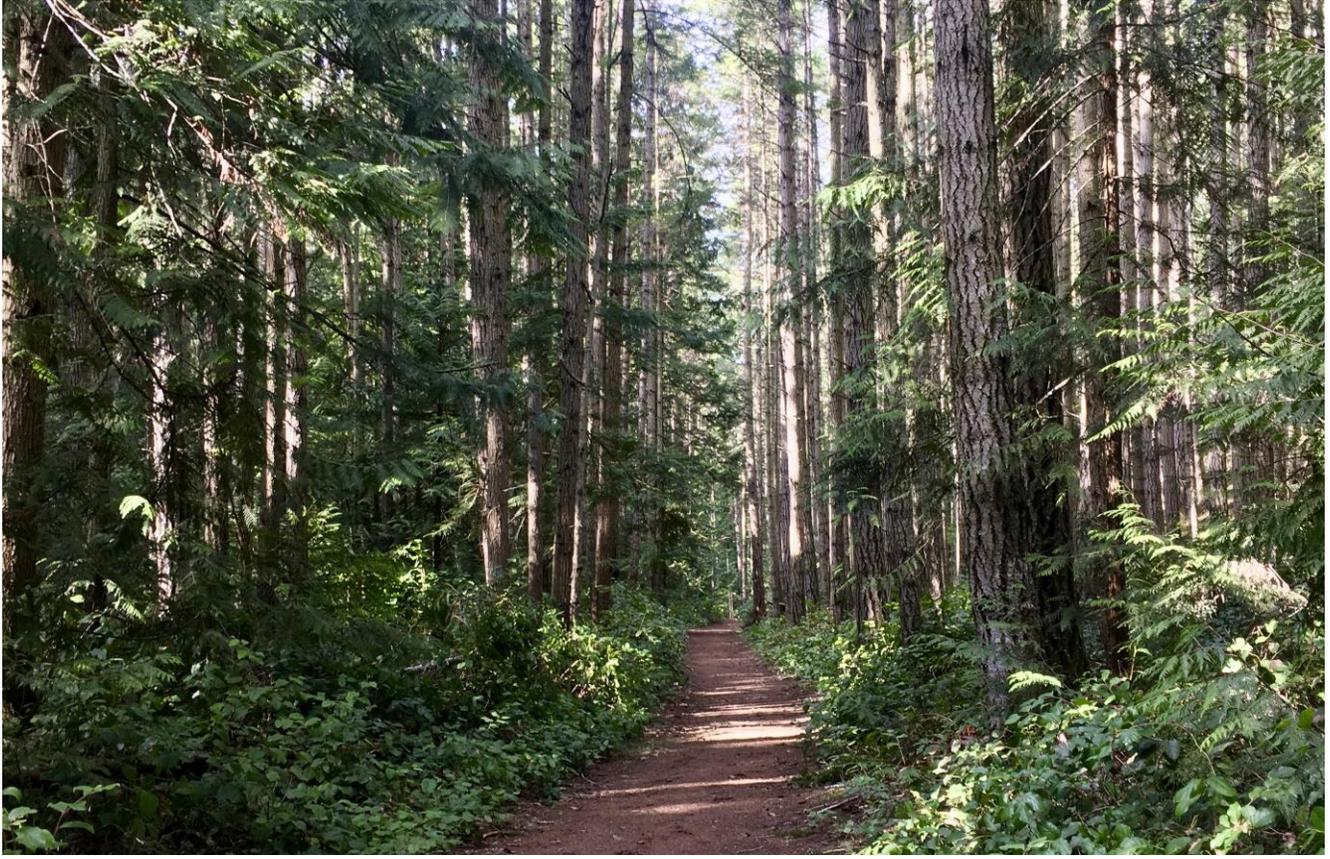
Adoration of the Child
Gerard van Honthorst 1592-1656
Uffizi Gallery

The Annunciation

El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos) 1541-1614



©Museo Nacional del Prado



Blessings

Several years ago, I switched from signing my correspondence from Shalom... to Peace... to now, Blessings. In some ways, I feel that this is a more true place of my hope for the person to whom I am sending greetings. I want what is best for people in God's eyes, a sense of wholeness and holiness that many people miss in the Hebrew word "Shalom" that is so frequently reduced from that global sense of wholeness to "peace". So, I changed words, hoping to portray a warmer sense of health and well-being. Sadly, this word, too, has become so used and changed that I fear that people mistake the meaning and miss it altogether.

Jan Richardson writes:

"An ancient literary form, a blessings is a distinctive constellation of words designed to call upon and convey God's deepest desire for our wholeness and well-being, both individually and in community... blessings enable us to perceive the ways the sacred inhabits the ordinary, impressing upon us that every moment and each place lies within the circle of God's care... A blessing will not fix us. It will not, of itself, resolve the difficulty we are in or undo harm we have caused or received. Instead, a blessing is a channel of the Divine, a

profound means of grace that has the capacity to open our eyes so that we might recognize and receive the help of the One who created us in love and whose deepest desire for us is that we be whole.” (Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons, Jan Richardson)

The Celtic tradition, out of which I most often find my spiritual home, uses blessings with great frequency. Celts are great believers in mystery and often use poetry and metaphor, particularly in blessings, to speak about the concerns of daily life: shelter, work, community, travel, birth, life and death. In the Celtic tradition, blessings are words that help us to bridge the distance between ourselves and the holy, creating “thin places” across which it is easy to reach.

This is not necessarily the way that blessings are given or received in today’s popular culture, however. Again, Jan Richardson does an excellent job of naming how American Christian culture tends to understand blessings; she says: “We often talk about blessings... as though they are a reward or a sign of special status, a measure of God’s providence toward us. Much of Christian culture equates blessings with prosperity, health, and abundance.” The danger of such an interpretation holds a downside, suggesting that those who do not have money, are ill, or have experienced some misfortune have not received God’s blessing. “In fact, blessings often work in quite the contrary kind of way. Rather than being an indicator or measure of God’s favor, a true blessing most often meets us in the place of our greatest need, desperation, pain, or lack. By design, a blessing finds us when it has become difficult to perceive the providence of God—those occasions when the benevolence of God is hard to fathom.”

From September up until Advent, I preached a sermon series entitled: “Unraveled: Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart.” Jan Richardson wrote a blessing that I found helpful for the series. It is entitled: “Blessing When the World is Ending,” and can be found on the next page.

Blessing When the World is Ending

—Jan Richardson

Circle of Grace:

A Book of Blessings for the Seasons

*“The sun will be darkened... and the powers
In the heavens will be shaken.” -Mark 13:24-25*

Look, the world
Is always ending
Somewhere.

Somewhere
The sun has come
Crashing down.

Somewhere
it has gone
Completely dark.

Somewhere
It has ended
With the gun,
The knife,
The fist.

Somewhere
It has ended
With the slammed doors,
The shattered hope.

Somewhere
it has ended
With the utter quiet
That follows the news
from the phone,
The television,
The hospital room.

Somewhere
It has ended
With a tenderness
That will break
Your heart.

But, listen,
This blessing means
To be anything
But morose.
It has not come
To cause despair.

It is here
simply because
There is nothing
A blessings
Is better suited for
Than an ending,
Nothing that cries out more
For a blessing
Than when a world
Is falling apart.

This blessing
Will not fix you,
Will not mend you,
Will not give you
False comfort;
It will not talk to you
About one door opening
When another one closes.

It will simply
Sit itself beside you
Among the shards
And gently turn your face
Toward the direction
From which the light
Will come,
Gathering itself
About you
As the world begins
Again.

Celtic author and poet, John O'Donahue, writes this about blessings:

“The word blessing evokes a sense of warmth and protection; it suggests that no life is alone or unreachable. Each life is clothed in raiment of spirit that secretly links it to everything else. Though suffering and chaos befall us, they can never quench that inner light of providence... A blessing evokes a privileged intimacy. It touches that tender membrane where the human heart cries out to its divine ground. In the ecstasy an loneliness of one's life, there are certain times when blessing is nearer to us than any other person or thing. A blessing is not a sentiment or a question; it is a gracious invocation where the human heart pleads with the divine heart... Let us begin to learn how to bless one another. Whenever you give a blessing, a blessing returns to enfold you.”

A Blessing for the New Year

BEANNACHT (for Josie)

On the day when
The weight deadens
On your shoulders
And you stumble,
May the clay dance
To balance you.

And when your eyes
Freeze behind
The gray window
And the ghost of loss
Gets into you,
May a flock of colors,
Indigo, red, green
And azure blue,
Come to awaken in you
A meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
In the curragh of thought
And a stain of ocean
Blackens beneath you,
May there come across the waters
A path of yellow moonlight
To bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the fluency of the ocean be yours,
May the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow
Wind work these words
Of love around you,
An invisible cloak
To mind your life.

Our invitation to you is to:

- **Reflect on the nature of blessings and your understanding of them; and/or**
- **Respond to the blessing above; and/or**
- **Write a blessing or blessings.**