



## **TIME'S UP:**

**Devotions from Birth to Baptism**

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*Voiced in Gospel*

The family line of Jesus Christ goes way back; way, way back. To David, the iconic king. To Abraham, the father of faith. It includes both a cathedral of saints and a gallery of rogues; there is nothing pious or sentimental to be found in Jesus' family. Instead, what one finds is real, earthy, human.

The family of Jesus includes such luminaries as the Patriarchs – All-Stars of the Bible – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel. But the family also includes the dastardly Judah who unknowingly rented his daughter-in-law Tamar as a prostitute. By the way, Tamar is one of the saints, whose courage to bear children for her fallen husband, as required in the Law, led to her desperate trickery with Judah. And twin boys.

The family is not altogether Jewish either but includes Ruth, the Moabites, whose son Obed was King David's grandfather. Imagine: the Anointed One of Israel was not of pure blood, but then he really was the Anointed One of *God*, wasn't he?

The family is littered with kings. It starts with David, the iconic one, yet also the exemplar of a man's frailty, whose "seduction" of Bathsheba, the wife of another man, was more rape than consent. For how does one say no to a king? Besides, their union led David to murder. The royal line continued with both fallen and faithful among them, both those who led the nation astray in the worship of false gods and the reformers who led the nation back to the Lord. There were people like Bathsheba's offspring, Solomon, who was wise in his youth but a wandering eye and greedy heart led him into an allegiance with many gods. And there was Solomon's son, Rehoboam, whose lightest burden was heavier than Solomon's greatest weight. Yet there were also those like Josiah whose Great Reform renewed the nation (and "discovered" the Book of Deuteronomy). Down through the centuries they march, this cathedral of saints and gallery of rogues. Real. Earthy. Human.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABOUT TIME'S UP

Copies of this devotional book can be found on the de Cristo and Grand Canyon websites at the following links:

- [www.presbyterydecristo.org/TimesUp](http://www.presbyterydecristo.org/TimesUp)
- [www.pbygrandcanyon.org/TimesUp](http://www.pbygrandcanyon.org/TimesUp)

As is customary within the two presbyteries, the documents are the same, as Munroe and the rest of the presbytery shared staff love each of their presbyteries equally. ☺

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## *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*Patriarchy fractured, hegemony crumbling, women throwing shade  
to the applause of the angels.  
Tamar redefining purity,  
Rahab celebrated for standing for Yahweh rather than known for  
laying under Baal,  
Ruth with Gentile DNA,  
Bathsheba, name not spoken, yet cannot be silenced,  
then twenty-four generations on and on and on – is time up? Really?  
Hope wanes, is waning, waning, waning. But wait  
Mary: theo-tokos.<sup>i</sup>  
God-bearer.  
Yes, time is up. Or at least kairos.<sup>ii</sup>  
Hosanna to the son of David!  
And to the women whose names cast a shadow that creates light –  
Respect.  
Five women, a Pentateuch of wisdom and courage,  
through whom God brings Messiah.*

## *Prayed in the Spirit*

Yahweh God, make us instruments of truth-telling,  
where there is deceit, let us sow courage,  
where there is danger, let us seize opportunity,  
where there is bitterness, let us trust hope,  
where there is oppression, let us remain steadfast,  
where there is fear, let us step forward that it may be as you say,  
where you call, let us bear your Name and your Presence into the world.  
O Lord of the *Kairos* moment, may we not so much seek  
to grab hold of our blessings as to live into them,  
to avoid hardship as to live beyond it,  
to live in the shadows as to shine light upon all.

For it is in hearing your call that we learn our true name,  
it is in stepping into faith that we are formed into new creation,  
it is in your *kenosis* that the Christ comes and we are a part of him.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice your relationships with people who are different from you: male to female, young to old, named and titled to unknown and discounted. To whom do you give more credence? Whose humanity do you more readily embrace? Notice. Pray. Act.

### *December 4 – Matthew 1:18-19*

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Do you want to know how it happened – this birth of Jesus? Jesus' mother was a promised woman, promised to Joseph. Exclusive. While chaste, Mary was found to be with child. Exclusive? The child was allegedly caused by Holy Spirit. Who can tell when it comes to the mysteries of God? Joseph, Mary's husband, was a righteous man, but not in the conventional sense; he did not want Mary stoned, nor humiliated, nor ostracized. Still, he was done. No more "exclusive" for Joseph. He was writing the certificate of divorce over and over and over in his mind. Sleep eluded him. What was he waiting for?

### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*The Choice appears obvious:  
appearances can be deceiving.  
Death or life? Shame or despair? Mary's good name or his own?  
In truth none of these were choices for Joseph,  
for he lived by a different law, according to a different Spirit:  
Leviticus? So cold, so hard, so clear.<sup>iii</sup>  
Flint striking granite. Or*

<sup>viii</sup> C.F. Genesis 4:1-9. The first recorded example of "jealously rearing its ugly head"  
<sup>xix</sup> C.F. John 1:5

<sup>xx</sup> Mother Teresa is the founder of the Sisters of Mercy in Calcutta, India. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who stood against Hitler. Bishop Oscar Romero stood against injustice, torture and murder in El Salvador. Mother Teresa experienced the depths of grinding poverty, and both Bonhoeffer and Romero were executed; however, each left a legacy that transformed and continues to transform.

<sup>xxi</sup> *El campo de Nicaragua* means "the countryside of Nicaragua."  
<sup>xxii</sup> C.F. Ezekiel 37:1-14 where the prophet sees a valley of dry bones, which God calls back to life.

<sup>xxiii</sup> C.F. Leviticus 25:8-13, in which the Israelites are commanded to proclaim freedom from debts throughout the land.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are two 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish mystics and authors, respectively, of *The Interior Castle* and *Dark Night of the Soul*.  
<sup>xxv</sup> Cruciform is a theological way to say, "formed by the cross," or "being shaped and guided by the cross." Often our modern discipleship ignores, evades, and even rejects "cruciform discipleship," but it is, historically, the Way of Jesus for the majority of Christians.

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A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.

Commentators note that Isaiah seems to put forward a new version of righteousness that competes with, and some argue supersedes, the Levitical law's rigid calculations.

<sup>v</sup> C.f. Mark 4:7

<sup>vi</sup> C.f. Acts 2:17-18, as Peter describes the day of Pentecost and the effect that happens when the Spirit is poured out upon humanity.

<sup>vii</sup> This allusion to God working while we are sleeping is self-evident in the Joseph story, but I notice its echo in the parable of the growing seed, Mark 4:26-29, especially verses 27-28. Calvinists everywhere rejoice at this notion of God bringing salvation unbeknownst to us and without our help, even while sleeping.

<sup>viii</sup> This refers to the comedian Will Ferrell, whose character in the movie, Talladega Nights, a spoof of the NASCAR racing circuit, says grace to "Baby Jesus" because the image of the Christ Child is "his favorite Jesus."

<sup>ix</sup> According to first-century Jewish custom, Joseph "adopted" Jesus as his own by asserting his right to name Jesus and in so doing asserted an union and intimacy forged in the bonds both of law and love.

<sup>x</sup> In case you are wondering, this prayer was written during the Winter Olympics. The "sixth quad" refers to U.S skater Nathan Chen, who had zero chance for a gold medal but soared into our hearts for attempting six, four-rotation leaps! Sometimes it's not about winning but about letting one's heart sing for the world to hear – and embrace.

<sup>xi</sup> *Goyyim* is the Hebrew word for nations or peoples.

<sup>xii</sup> *Imago dei* means "image of God."

<sup>xiii</sup> The name Israel means "wrestles with God."

<sup>xiv</sup> C.f. Ephesians 2:14 – "he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...."

<sup>xv</sup> C.f. Ephesians 2:15 – "His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two...."

<sup>xvi</sup> C.f. Ephesians 2:12 – "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*

*Isaiah? Gentle, yearning, righteousness borne of a nation's brokenness.<sup>iv</sup>  
The ambiguity of a breeze: old versus new.  
Joseph chose new righteousness, becoming  
Protector of Bruised Reeds,  
Patron saint of Smoldering Wicks,  
model for manliness for those who have ears to hear.  
Fresh mercy every morning not only for me and mine but  
for every tribe, every clan, every tongue,  
even those from "S\*\*\*hole" countries.  
I suspect it cost Joseph dearly, living into this new righteousness,  
so misunderstood among those for whom cold, hard, and clear  
appears to be God's choice.  
Appearances can be deceiving.*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me a protector of bruised reeds,  
where there is cold calculation, let me bring warm embrace,  
where there is hardness of heart, let me bring gentleness of spirit,  
where flint strikes granite, let me point toward mercy's dew,  
where others cast out, let me draw in,  
where others shame and blame, let me name with a divine claim,  
where there is a too easy clarity, let me bring questions,  
oh, so many, many questions.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to snuff out the smoldering wick as to reignite the flames of justice,  
to fear brokenness as to be transformed by it,  
to shout, "Crucify!" as to pray at the foot of the Cross.  
For it is in being embraced by your mercy that we share it with others,  
it is in welcoming Mary into my home that God possibilities flourish,  
it is in singing a new song that the birth of Messiah Jesus comes about.

### ***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the number and ways people are “broken” or “hurting.” Who are the bruised reeds among you? Whose wick is smoldering? How are *you* bruised? How are *you* smoldering? Open your heart to giving and receiving God’s mercy to, for, through, and among those whom you encounter today. Notice. Pray. Act.

### *December 5 – Matthew 1:20*

#### *Voiced in Gospel*

Finally sleep came and with it a dream. And an angel, who said, “Joseph, Son of God’s Promise, be not afraid. God’s love has overshadowed Mary, even as it will overshadow your fear, your anger and all your doubting.”

#### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

People say fear limits the heart; much more does it enslave the mind. Hearts break and, sooner or later, later or sooner, heal. But a mind? Broken minds last and last and last... flowing water becomes ice. PTSD of the soul.

Joseph, tempted to fear, expected to fear,

is saved by dreaming – not thinking or scheming or even believing;

*dreaming.*

*Imagination’s double-helix: Watson and Crick for the spiritual realm. The spiral, spiral, spiral of growing, developing, multiplying*

*Faith. Hope. Love.*

Hamlet asked, “To sleep, perchance to dream.”

Joseph responds, “To dream, perchance to live.”

Hidden awake, revealed asleep – God’s Promise, God’s Peace.

Have we forgotten this ancient dance?

Neglected the God-dreams given to us as children?

Deserted all God-possibilities of our youth?

Allowed them to be choked out of us like the Sower’s thirt?

**Go into the world...** Notice the ways you and others talk about oneself. Does your own “self-talk” express that your belovedness? Does the way you describe yourself, your actions, your intentions, etc. convey a sense that you are formed by grace for a purpose? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### *Practiced in Life*

when letting go, let me find release,  
when grabbing hold, let it be the work of God,  
when dying, let me descend ever deeper,  
when living, let me arise ever higher.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the freedom to be me as the freedom to become my true self,  
to affirm my good works as to trust in your righteousness,  
to look for a sign as to grow into an awareness  
that, in baptism, I bear the sign of your love.  
For it is in the baptismal waters that I am named,  
it is the name given from before creation and after the end of all things,  
it is the name of your beloved: Child of the Holy, Eternal One.

of incarnation when it affirmed Mary as God-bearer.

! “Theotokos” is a Greek word that means “God-bearer.” It contrasts with the word *Christotokos* which means “Christ-bearer.” A debate among the Apostolic Fathers and Mothers was whether or not Mary was *theotokos* or merely *christotokos*? The Church decided in favor of a more robust doctrine

of incarnation when it affirmed Mary as God-bearer. In contrast to moment in time when God’s actions form or transform reality. For Jesus to say, “The time is at hand, the kingdom of God has come,” is a *kairos* moment.

III C.F. Leviticus 20:10.

IV C.F. Isaiah 42:3, spoken to a nation still in Babylonian exile, in which it is said of the servant of the Lord,

**December 25 – Matthew 3:13-17**

***Voiced in Gospel***

The Child grew into a man, Jesus, who came to John the Baptizer from the fertile, agricultural region of Galilee in the northwest. Jesus came to the arid desert in the east through which flowed the Jordan river. Jesus presented himself to be baptized by John. John was appalled: “Never! You should baptize me!”

Jesus responded, “John, it is the right thing for me to do. If I am going to be the leader of this new beginning, the restoration of Israel, I need to be a part of everything, and that includes every form of right relations – with God, with you, with all these who have come to the desert seeking a new beginning.” John agreed to Jesus’ request.

The moment Jesus was baptized, as he rose from the water, in that singular instant, eternity burst forth. Jesus looked upon his true home and saw God-Life – the Holy Spirit – winging toward him as a dove, sign of peace and of God’s favor, symbol of renewal and of God’s faithfulness. The whisper of heaven thundered, “This is my Son, my Beloved, and joy fills my heart.”

***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*Into the waters, descending to depth,*

*darkness of abyss, death meeting Death.*

*Purgation. Release. Deliverance.*

*And then...*

*Liberty. Expectation. Hope.*

*life meeting Life, light brimming, bursting, brazen in clarity.*

*Ascending Jacob’s ladder from the waters.*

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me a vessel of grace formed by baptismal waters,  
when walking away from, let me relinquish my sin,  
when walking toward, let me seek right relationships,

*Might, can, will, should – God-dreams live again?*

*And with them, Holy Spirit?*

*Oh, father Joseph, pray for us sinners in the hours of our life!*

***Prayed in the Spirit***

O Lord, make me a vessel full of dreams,  
where there are limits, let me see possibilities,  
where there are roadblocks, let me travel o’er mountains,  
where there are only naysayers, let me be deaf,  
where there is scarcity, let me see your abundance,  
where there is the unknown and uncertain, let me be known, for certain,  
where there is fear, let me dream.

O Divine dream-giver, may I not so much seek  
to live out my own life-script as to embrace your Divine narrative,  
to avoid great challenge as to dream bigger dreams,  
to hear the Siren’s call of my fears  
as to listen to the whispers of Holy Spirit.

For it is in heeding Holy Spirit that sons and daughters prophesy,<sup>vi</sup>  
it is in sacred whisper the young see visions and the old dream dreams,  
it is in Joseph’s sleep, and our own, that God brings life among us.<sup>vii</sup>

***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the place of fear in your life and in others. How are your actions directed by fear in its many colors: embarrassment, shame, worry, doubt, and suspicion? Spend 20 minutes daydreaming. Listen to the whispers of the Spirit? What wonders make your heart sing? To whom is God calling you to be a blessing today? Notice. Pray. Act.

**Voiced in Gospel**

Gabriel, the messenger of the Lord, told Joseph, "Name the boy Yeshua – He Who Saves – for from their own brokenness will God heal his people; their darkened souls will become prisms of light."

**Interpreted for Heart and Mind**

No one imagines the mirror as spiritual tool.

Comfort comes from the peek out the window:

the folly of neighbors my sacred scorn.

More intense still is the window of oppression:

the cruelty of enemies my body lament.

"How long, O Lord, 'til you smite my enemies?"

Comes the angel with disturbing news:

"The mirror is the only way."

Not Rome, nor Caesar.

Not Herod, nor the Pharisees.

Neither Trump nor Obama.

Not your mom or your dad or your ex or your boss.

You.

You are the One who needs healing and wholeness,

cleansing and renewal,

forgiveness.

Don't look out the window at their sins.

Yeshua comes to save you from your sins.

**Prayed in the Spirit**

Lord, make me a mirror-looking saint,

when tempted to peek out the window, place the mirror before me,

when tempted to cast about for other's sins, let me confront mine own,

when tempted to name other's problems, let me confess mine own,

Discover Love! Invite Love!

Seek Justice! Honor Shalom!

For gone shall be the ways of cruelty,

over shall be the paths of inequity,

burned in unquenchable fire shall be

the prison of despair and desolation.

**Prayed in the Spirit**

Lord, make me an instrument of purgation,

where greed lives, let me seek generosity,

where malice thrives, let me find mercy,

where control is an obsession, let me learn to let go,

where ego drives, let me learn to let God,

where envy clouds, let me find thanksgiving,

where lust distorts, let me seek wholeness.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek

to judge others as to accept the gift of your judgment,

to avoid the fires of Hell

as to accept the cleansing fires of your purgation,

to rest on my laurels as to rest in Thee.

For it is in losing my life that I will find it,

it is in letting go of grasping that I am open to receiving,

it is in giving up my false self

that I become the Child of God you created me to be.

**Practiced in Life**

**Go into the world...** Notice what you "feed." Do you feed the list of honorable things (c.f. Philippians 4:8), or do you feed greed, malice, et al.? Notice the sense of balance, wholeness, and peace that comes when you feast on honorable things. Notice. Pray. Act.



*Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the ways you embrace repentance or resist it. How open are you to hear the “kind” word from a friend? How welcome is the word of rebuke spoken in love? Do you tend toward defensiveness or toward a too quick embracing of others’ critique (for both are problematic responses)? Notice. Pray. Act.

**December 24 – Matthew 3:7-12**

*Voiced in Gospel*

But then John saw others coming to the place – leaders of Israel all, the self-proclaimed Righteous of the Rules and Templars of the Temple (Pharisees and Sadducees by name). John was incensed! “Snakes! Scorpions! Crawling away from God’s wrath are you? Make your lives a vineyard; ferment the wine of purity, harvest the abundance of justice! Do not claim bloodlines as your holiness; your DNA does not approve you. From simple stones God can create Abraham’s true children. Indeed, the Vineyard keeper is ready to prune! All that is not of God will be burned away, for only what is worthy will remain. I baptize you with water, as a sign that one is sorry, as a symbol that one seeks to turn away from evil and turn toward God, but He Who Is to Come will follow and more powerful is He; (I am not worthy to bow before him). He will baptize you with God’s Spirit, a sign that God-Life is upon you, a seal of God’s promised shalom. He will purge away all that is not of the Lord – gathering compassion by the heap and justice by the hoard but tossing cruelty and injustice into a fire whose thirst for such things cannot be quenched.

*Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*From the prison of despair lifts the song of God’s hope,  
from the place of desolation wings the dove of God’s peace.  
Yet the song sounds a discordant note,  
the dove’s wings pierce as the falcon’s.*

when confronted with the mirror, let mine eyes remain open,  
when the mirror is friend or family, let me receive rebuke as gift,  
when mirror is enemy or “other,” let me see your Hand of Grace.

O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to look outward than to look inward,  
to blame sin on others as to claim grace for all,  
to fret about my enemies as to affirm,  
“I have met the enemy...and the enemy is I.”

For it is in honest humility that we are freed through forgiveness,  
it is in humble accountability that we are freed for forgiveness,  
it is in, with and by grace, your grace, the one and only grace that saves,  
that forgiveness flows through us to others,  
making enemy and stranger, friend and neighbor.

*Lived as Practice*

**Go into the world...** Notice those times you focus blame on others while making excuses for your own, similar behavior? Notice those times when you do actually blame yourself: Is the blame the work of Holy Spirit leading you to honest conviction according to God’s Word? Or is the blame the work of the Accuser who seeks to deflate, and even destroy, your spirit? (Hint: the Spirit’s work is always life-affirming, leading to a sense of conviction and wholeness, while the Accuser’s work often mires one in self-doubt or self-flogging.) Notice. Pray. Act.

**December 7 – Matthew 1:22-23**

*Voiced in Gospel*

Mary will be the *theotokos*, the God-bearer, and you will name this child *Immanuel* – God Is with Us – just as God’s truth-teller, Isaiah, spoke from ages to ages past.

### ***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*Hope clothed in wildness;  
desperation birthing openness;  
Political oppression eliminating choices;  
desire crushed at every turn.  
The Enemy is not who they think it is:  
“Turn around!” comes the command – “Change and be changed!”  
Not outward obsession but inward gaze:  
“Fragmented hearts...divided loyalties...sin-tinged spirits.”  
And with the command a promise:  
fresh and exhilarating and brisk,  
immersion into a life of straight lines, pure hearts, right relations.  
And all we have to do is wait.*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of immersion,  
when others tip toe upon the surface, let me plunge to the depths,  
when others merely offer loving words, let me match words with deeds,  
where there is need for knowledge, let me also seek wisdom,  
where there is need for compassion, let me also pursue justice,  
when others merely tolerate friends, let me also love enemies,  
when others stroll the shallow lanes of this world,  
let me harvest the deep places.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to tweak my plan as to open myself to your life-changing plans,  
to want change as to want to be changed,  
to seek a new place to live as to seek the kingdom on earth as in heaven.  
For it is inward honesty that ignites the spark of renewal,  
it is obedience to the word of rebuke that flames the fire of restoration,  
it is from the wildness of old that new life comes.

### ***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*With.  
No mere existence together: side by side, couch potato-ing through life.  
Not parallel travels: getting our kicks on Route 66 and then going our separate ways.  
Not the quiet desperation of so many a marriage.  
Not the slow death of too many churches that pretend they are mines.  
With.  
God-life in-breaking, destroying assumptions.  
God-hope shattering despair, planting seeds.  
God-love breaking down walls of hostility between self and the “Other.”  
God-whimsy in Ricky Bobby’s favorite Jesus:<sup>™</sup>  
With.  
Who would – who could – have guessed such sacred silliness?  
Immanuel.  
God with us.  
Jesus.*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Immanuel, make me an instrument of with-ness,  
when others keep their distance, let me connect,  
when relationships rupture, let me repair,  
when the Church rejects, let me embrace,  
where God-void is encountered, let me give birth,  
where God-cloudiness envelops, let me serve as midwife,  
where God-cry laments, let me bear *theotokos* into the world.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be known as one who claims you as to be one who is with you,  
to claim your allegiance as to welcome your presence,  
to boast of my closeness to you as to rejoice in your presence with me.  
For it is in being God-bearers that, like Mary, we bring grace,  
it is in having her courage and faith that God-Life is birthed,

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the way you respond to unexpected things. Are you pleasantly surprised or do you feel it is a disruption? Do you dig in your heels or open your heart? Notice. Pray. Act.

**December 22 – Matthew 3:1-6**

### *Voiced in Gospel*

At God's appointed time, there appeared in the wilderness east of the Jordan river a truth-teller of the day named John the Baptizer. From the same place the Israelites of old crossed into the Land of Promise. So from that place John proclaimed a new beginning: "About face! Turn Around! Change your ways and allow God to change you, for heaven is near, the rule of God swirls in the wind." John was the one that Isaiah, the truth-teller from ages to ages past, spoke about when he said:

A Voice. A Message. The Call.

In the wilderness of old, prepare anew a way for the Lord,  
Straight lines, pure hearts, right relations.

John was a sight to behold: camel's hair overcoat with a leather belt; his food was what swarmed on the ground and within the hive. People swarmed from miles around for they wondered openly, "Could John be the One, God's Anointed? Could God be ready to restore Israel, to vanquish the Romans? Is the Revolution at hand?" So eager were the people for freedom from their outward enemy, they were willing to be honest about their inner adversaries: their fragmented hearts, the divided loyalties of their minds, their sin-tinged spirits. John honored their honesty with a sign: baptism in the Jordan river, through whence their forbearers had entered the Land in ages past. With this sign, John announced their readiness for He Who Is to Come.

it is in Immanuel we learn you are not against us and we are not alone.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the moments of God's perceived presence and of God's perceived absence. Are there common themes to God's presence or absence? Does your being Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (HALT) affect your experience of God? Seek to become aware of Immanuel: God-with-you today. Notice. Pray. Act.

**December 8 – Matthew 1:24-25**

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Joseph awoke from his dream – was it only a dream? Yes, but dreams have power, and so this dream's power transformed Joseph. He embraced Mary in the covenant of love, as his wife, yet remained chaste until the boy was born. Joseph adopted the boy as his own son by asserting his right to name the child: Jesus.<sup>ix</sup>

### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*There is power in a choice.*

*"I choose family," said the dad who could never be father.*

*Nothing forced, coerced, required, or obligated.*

*Chosen.*

*Like saying yes to a cool breeze on a summer's day.*

*Joy for the low, low price of naming a boy not technically his own.*

*Yet in the naming the boy became something new:*

*shared, a part of deeper union, real consummation of love's covenant.*

*For in the naming the boy became a son.*

*upon the chosen is found the sure and certain sign one is God's child:  
something new rises before them,  
and within and around and between them,  
something they did not see and could not envision,  
something only God could create,  
as it were – ex nihilo – out of nothing:  
a life of call and challenge,  
destiny.*

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of calling;  
where others settle for the status quo,  
let me remain open to the Spirit's call,  
where others walk their own path, let me walk God's Way,  
where others sleep the sleep of the dead,  
let me sleep the restlessness of the dreamer,  
where others desire certainty, let me seek discernment,  
where others settle for the shadow of Archelaus,  
let me be willing to heed the dream planted within me,  
where others return to Judea, let me be open to Nazareth.  
O Divine Dream Weaver, let me not so much seek  
to mold my destiny as to be molded by your Word,  
to plan my next move as to follow your Spirit's moving,  
to believe I know what's best as to be surprised by grace.  
For it is in opening oneself to the dream that we are guided,  
it is in following the call that we are led,  
it is the journey to Nazareth that ultimately leads  
to both Cross and Empty Tomb.

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of naming,  
where anonymity cripples, let me seek to know another,  
where namelessness means forsaken, let me see, hear, and call,  
where society forgets, let me remember,  
where society ignores, let me notice,  
where encountered are those who are faceless,  
where confronted by those who are nameless,  
let me speak them into dignity.  
O God of Joseph, may I not so much seek  
to claim parental rights as to embrace all children in love,  
to do what is expedient as to live according to what is just,  
to tolerate the kid as to embrace the child.  
For it is in union and communion that community is formed,  
it is in loving the single mom that boys become men,  
it is in naming Jesus as one's own that Jesus finds a home.

***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the stranger. Notice the alone. Speak to them. Encounter them. What is their name? What is their story? Open yourself to the common themes in each other's narratives. Be a place of welcome. Notice. Pray. Act.

***December 10 – Matthew 2:1***

***Voiced in Gospel***

Jesus was born in the City of David, Bethlehem, only six miles from Jerusalem, in the region known as Judea. Herod was king – brilliant architect yet brutal dictator, murderer of his many sons to guard his only crown.

O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to flee into exile as to know when to leave and when to return,  
to avoid all chaos as to be intentional in observing Sabbath,  
to desire only the calm as to know when to encounter the storm.  
For there is a time and a season for everything under the sun,  
a time for exile and a time to return,  
a time to stand, a time to engage, a time to bear my cross.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the moments when “the Storm” seems to close upon you. What are the symptoms of its coming? What signs direct you to becoming distracted, fatigued, or overwhelmed? Give yourself permission to live in the presence of God. Having done so, what are the symptoms and signs God is calling you back into the fray? Notice. Pray. Act.

*December 21 – Matthew 2:22-23*

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Joseph returned to the Land of Promise with the Child and the God-bearer, but they did not return to Judea, in the shadow of Jerusalem, for Herod the Great’s only-slightly-less-maniacal son, Archelaus, had replaced his father. But God was faithful to guide and direct: “Go to the region of Galilee, to the village of Nazareth, that the words of the truth-teller from ages to ages past might be fulfilled: ‘The Anointed will be called a Nazarene.’” All this was spoken, of course, in a dream.

### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*Blessed are those who dream dreams,  
whose visions lurch them forward toward hope –  
they shall never be bored.*

*For with God’s blessing comes detours and discernment,*

### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*So close and yet so far.  
So close Bethlehem – six miles, an hour’s walk, so near the throne.  
So far the City of David – only the promised need apply.  
Herod’s brilliance and brutality side by side, hand in hand.  
Lovers on a solitary walk  
to destiny  
or is it infamy?  
So far the crown that lay uneasy upon Herod’s head.  
So close the king born to humility  
in the heart and beyond earth’s bounds.*

### *Prayed in the Spirit*

Lord, make me an instrument of Divine irony,  
where others seek power, may I let go,  
where others seek glory, may I let God,  
when I encounter greed, may I let go,  
when I encounter spite, may I let God,  
while others fret, may I let go,  
while others scheme, may I let God.

O Diving Master, may I not so much seek  
to win the gold as to leap for the sixth quad,<sup>x</sup>  
to seek acclaim as to embrace the ride,  
to know the thrill of victory as to celebrate our shared humanity.  
For it was in the manger not the throne where a king was found,  
it was not Herod’s brilliance but Jesus’ humility that transformed history,  
it was in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, redemption began.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the ways giftedness accompanies goofiness in yourself and others. Notice those of acclaim who err. Notice the ways your own spirit is twisted when it cannot or will not accept your

blessedness. Notice the ways your spirit is twisted when it cannot or will not accept your brokenness. Of what are you afraid? Let go, let God. Notice. Pray. Act.

***December 11 – Matthew 2:2***

From the Arabian Desert came “wise men,” astrologers perhaps or scientists or sages. Whoever they were, they did not belong to Israel. Thus, they did not belong in Israel. Foreigners. Gentiles. Unclean. *Goyim!*

***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

Foreigner, how dare you journey to the Land of the Chosen? Why seek a king among those who are not your own? You are not welcome here, O Nations!  
*The lure of the heart is a Siren,  
the call of God an unquenchable thirst,  
how can we not journey, O Israel!*

Abraham is our Father; the Land of Promise our birthright!  
Law was given; prophets speak  
to us, and to us alone, *Goyim!*<sup>xv</sup>  
We, too, are *imago dei*; in the image of God also created;<sup>xvi</sup>  
And the Star's song a gift, a mother's lullaby to we who are untimely born,  
To we who also would wrestle with God, O Israel.<sup>xvii</sup>

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Creator, make me a destroyer of walls,  
where others build, let me destroy,  
where others prevent, let me empower,  
where others reserve rights for some, let me proclaim them for all,  
where others obfuscate, let me illuminate,  
where others cause to stumble, let me help to walk,  
where others oppress, let me liberate.

***December 20 – Matthew 2:19-21***

***Voiced in Gospel***

Herod the Great was dead and the Storm eased for the moment. The Lord's angel appeared once again to Joseph, directing him, “Journey back with the Child and the God-bearer to the Land of Promise, Israel, for Herod's mayhem died with him.” Joseph once again acted upon God's Word to him.

***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*God's mercy the eye of the storm;  
eternal love the peace that passes understanding.  
Yet knowing what awaits beyond the wall of the storm's eye,  
Archelaus who will replace Herod,  
death that stalks our communities,  
loud voices – indeed, the mounting cacophony of  
blame, defensiveness, and irresponsibility  
that flows like lava over our armies,  
around our family tables, and  
even from our pulpits,  
the eye of the storm is welcome:  
a breath, a sigh, thanksgiving,  
enough to venture back into the storm.*

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of calm,  
where there is blame, let me take responsibility,  
where there is defensiveness, let me listen carefully,  
where there is irresponsibility, let me model integrity,  
where cloudiness confuses, let me speak with clarity,  
where storm waters rise, let me listen with consideration,  
where chaos reigns, let me act with conviction.

*Inescapable, unavoidable, overwhelming,  
teaching muted dance and quiet spirit and whispers of God's love.*

*For Gospel borne is womb made new,  
awakened for hope and for sorrow.*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of holy lament,  
where there are wounds in self or others, let me feel the depths,  
where injustice reigns, let me stand angry and observant,  
where raw is the soul of complaint, let me speak fury into the world,  
when others mourn, let me cry also,  
when death overwhelms, let me refuse to look away,  
when Herod commits cruelty, let me be as Rachel.

God of the Cross, may I not so much seek  
to see only the manger as to allow Herod, too, to be in the Story,  
to celebrate the Cradle as to remember it leads to a Cross,  
to turn a deaf ear to Rachel's cry as to weep when she weeps.

For the journey to Easter is the path of suffering,  
the wounded healer whose balm is in Golgotha,  
cruciform discipleship<sup>xv</sup> the Way of Jesus.

### ***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the presence of suffering in the world and your response to it. Do you avoid its lament? Steel yourself against it? Embrace it for a time only, eventually to look away? Experiment with adding your voice to Rachel's voice – to cry out against injustice and suffering in the world – through your prayers. What impact does such prayer have upon your soul? Notice. Pray. Act.

O Destroyer of The Wall of Hostility,<sup>xiv</sup> let me not so much seek  
to claim my own rights as to protect the rights of others,  
to divide humanity as to join You in making one new humanity,<sup>xv</sup>  
to rejoice I am a child of the covenant as to invite others to the party.  
For it is a party of your invitation – to oneness, unity, and peace,  
it is in rejoicing in shared humanity that we express our one hope,<sup>xvi</sup>  
it is in building bridges that God is found in the world.<sup>xvii</sup>

### ***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice distinctions that divide. Beyond the obvious – gender, race, etc. – notice the ways you divide consciously and unconsciously. Repent, O Sinner! Then, as you experience God's forgiveness, forgive yourself also, but continue to notice. Notice. Pray. Act.

## ***December 12 – Matthew 2:2-3***

### ***Voiced in Gospel***

These wise men were searching for Israel's new king, so of course they went to the capital. To Jerusalem. To Herod. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews," they asked innocently, without guile? "We saw his Star in the east and have come to worship him." This news stirred Herod's jealous soul, and so all Jerusalem was troubled. A Storm was brewing; the people could smell it in the wind.

### ***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*As old as Cain and Abel,<sup>xviii</sup> as petty as Donald and Kim,  
jealousy rears its ugly head: "So Sad!"*

*Petty playground bullying leads to Columbine and to Parkland  
(and too many others in between).*

*Yet the Star shone, still shines,*

*"...and the darkness cannot overcome the light."<sup>xix</sup>*

*Is following a Star in a world of jealousy fool's errand or act of faith?  
 Ask Mother Teresa or Bonhoeffer or Bishop Romero...  
 Ask those who serve in soup kitchens or place water in the desert.  
 Ask the ones whose lives are saved – inside and out – by those who claim  
 Good News  
 is worth following.*

***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me like the Star of Bethlehem,  
 in the darkness, let me shine your light,  
 in the depths, let me bring your mercy,  
 to the lost, let me point the way,  
 to the least, let me shine your grace,  
 for the lonely, let me bring your presence,  
 for all who seek, let me point to the Savior.  
 O Morning Star, may I not so much seek other's praise as your approval,  
 to control my destiny as to abide in your eternity,  
 to glorify myself as to bow before your throne.

For it is the way of humility you show, the path of jealousy you reject,  
 it is the searchers and seekers who find, not the stationary,  
 it is without guile that we must come before the One, True King.

***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the way you compare yourself to others.  
 When you feel better? When you feel lesser? When you feel pride or  
 shame? Notice also those moments when you are without guile – when  
 “what they see is what they get”? Which moments feel like God’s shalom?  
 Notice. Pray. Act.

***Practiced in Life***

**Go into the world...** Notice the moments when God seems absent. How  
 do you encounter such moments? As sign of God’s faithlessness? As holy  
 terror? Or as invitation to trust? Notice your interior rhythms, the dance  
 of your soul, when God seems absent. What messages do you tell yourself  
 in these moments? When encountered, breathe deeply and exhale – then  
 trust God to show up in God’s time. Notice. Pray. Act.

***December 19 – Matthew 2:16-18***

***Voiced in Gospel***

Herod the Great was fuming; the Storm was about to be  
 unleashed. Realizing the Magi had played him for the fool, Herod  
 orchestrated murder, mayhem, tragedy: “Kill. Slaughter. No mercy.”  
 Herod the Great’s unholy symphony targeted the least powerful, the most  
 vulnerable – children all – the Boys of Bethlehem who were two years old  
 and younger, who matched what the Magi had told Herod the Great  
 regarding the time the Star had appeared in the east. Thus was cast the  
 shadow of Jeremiah, truth-teller from ages to ages past:

A mother’s heart shall not be healed  
 when it is her child who is taken,  
 For the emptiness in her heart has a name: My Beloved.

So sacred is the wound that not even God will fill it,  
 Rachel’s heart allows only the communion of the Her Beloved.

***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*Dreams of Hope, Nightmares of Sorrow,  
 of both is the Gospel borne.  
 To highest heights, to deepest depths,  
 journeys the soul who seeks the Lord.  
 And into this journey travels the Dark Night:*



### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*Dark nights can be scary things,  
Conjuring ghosts and ghouls,  
strangers lurking around corners or behind bushes.  
But dark nights can be good for the soul.  
Teresa of Avila knew it.  
As did John of the Cross.<sup>xxiv</sup>  
Oppression can breed despair or hope, futility or faith,  
the absence of God an invitation to trust.  
Was Jesus aware he was in Egypt, land of ancient oppressor?  
Or did he only sense his parents' apprehension?  
From the womb of darkness comes life and light –  
holy crying, sacred lament –  
for the goodness and mercies of our God.*

### *Prayed in the Spirit*

Lord make me an instrument worthy of sacred lament,  
where there is darkness, let me embrace it,  
where death is found, let me not look away,  
where wounds the body, let me persevere,  
where grieves the soul, let me be at prayer,  
where wonders the heart, let me await your stillness,  
where found is your absence, let me await your presence.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to expect spiritual ecstasy as to offer my own constancy,  
to seek bigger and better as to seek faith and faithfulness,  
to avoid all pain as to carry my cross.  
For it is the life of Jesus which guides my path,  
it is his cross that shows me the way,  
it is his death – and my own – that leads to eternal life.

### *December 13 – Matthew 2:4-6*

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Herod called together his pantheon of lackeys – clerics and politicians, economists and historians – “Where is God’s Anointed to be born,” he demanded?

“In Bethlehem,” they answered, “for God’s truth-teller from ages to ages past had spoken:

It’s you, O Little Town, City of David,  
Though small, you are not insignificant,  
For from your fields God will bring forth a shepherd for Israel.

### *Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*Big Macs and Double Whoppers. Hummers and Ram Tough.  
New York. London. Tokyo. Moscow.  
Where are you found, O Lord, in this world of  
bigger is better?  
Where can I hear your still, small voice in a culture of  
high decibel programming?  
How long, O Lord, will you forget us forever?  
Will you speak again to your Church  
gathered in huts in el campo de Nicaragua<sup>xxv</sup>  
joyfully singing on the African plain  
slowing, aging, shrinking on the corner of Church and Main?  
Could your Word be once again for us?  
Or are we beyond being significant?  
Unable to allow ourselves to become the womb of your creating.  
Preachers and politicians, Wall Street and Madison Ave  
tell us we no longer matter  
our influence a desiccated, half-consumed apple  
along the side of the road.*

*What do you say, Lord?*

*Do you have a Word for the likes of us?*

### *Prayed in the Spirit*

Lord, mold me as a jar of clay,

where others see dust, let me become New Adam or New Eve,

where others see dry bones, let me hear Ezekiel's call,<sup>xxii</sup>

when the sun withers, let me find shade beneath your wings,

when thorns choke, let me let go the worries of this life,

amidst bigger is better, let me have faith like the mustard seed,

amidst high volume ranting, let me listen for the still, small voice.

○ Divine Master, let me not so much seek

to be known by many as to be approved by you,

to be lauded and applauded as to allow your Spirit to blow where it will,

to glean the fruit of my own labor as to bear fruit for your Harvest.

For it is in planting seeds of faith that sprouts the nurture of justice,

it is in nurturing seeds of hope that grows the fruit of kindness,

it is in the harvest of love that we walk humbly before you, our God.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice small things. Notice the seemingly insignificant. How many times during the day do you encounter quiet grace? Simple goodness? The gift of another? Notice. Pray. Act.

### *December 14 – Matthew 2:7-8*

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Herod, a wily politician if ever there was, secretly consorted with the Magi, inquiring of them when the Star had appeared in the east. Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem, saying, "Scour the households; sweep the streets; find the child that I, too, may worship my new king."

beyond a place to stay, let me provide a home,

in the midst of terror, let me be safe haven,

in the loss of community, let me be friend,

in the building of a new life, let me be guide.

○ Divine Master, let me not so much seek

to be welcomed as to offer hospitality,

to be always secure as to create safe places,

to remember me and mine as to see the stranger as brother or sister.

For it was into exile the Patriarchs were called and Israel was forced,

it was to same Jesus went willingly,

it is now our privilege to honor those who walk in His steps.

### *Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice the strangers you encounter. How many of them "aren't from these parts"? How often do you encounter the refugee, the immigrant, the asylee? Imagine their hardships and their hearts – what circumstances would you need to encounter to flee your home forever? Notice. Pray. Act.

### *December 18 – Matthew 2:14-15*

### *Voiced in Gospel*

Joseph acted on God's Word to him. He took the Child and the God-bearer in the dark of night and scuttled off to Egypt. To Egypt – land of Pharaoh, heritage of oppression, yet, in this moment, refuge. The Holy Family abided in this sacred irony until Herod's death, which fulfilled what the Lord had spoken from ages to ages past through his truth-teller: "From Egypt, Womb of Oppression, I will bring forth my Son – New Birth of Freedom."

going to do what Herod the Great does: murder, mayhem, tragedy. Live in Egypt but do not plant roots, for I will call you home.”

### ***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*Exile.*  
*Familiar home to God’s people*  
*in Israel and around the world.*  
*Wandering but not alone,*  
*rootless but not bereft,*  
*our community the soil beneath one’s feet,*  
*our hope known only as promise.*  
*Jesus began life in exile*  
*wandering but loved,*  
*rootless but learning the rhythms of God’s provision,*  
*his community the welcome of the world’s great power,*  
*promise fulfilled in the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary.*  
*Today we are surrounded by exiles*  
*for whom Rwanda or Honduras or Liberia*  
*will never again be seen or heard or felt,*  
*concussive drums never beating,*  
*mountain vistas only on the internet,*  
*Mother’s soil never again sticking between toes.*  
*“Flee!” their families warned, and so they fled,*  
*for murder, mayhem, and tragedy still stalk the vulnerable.*  
*Jesus knows their lament:*  
*“Come, Lord Jesus! Bring us home!”*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord, make me an instrument of hospitality,  
beyond mere welcome, let me provide warmth,  
beyond a quick hello, let me provide a long embrace,

### ***Interpreted for Heart and Mind***

*So subtle the sin that entwines by inviting us to dance,*  
*manipulating our courtesy with its pernicious intent,*  
*entangling our soul because we do not have eyes to see*  
*or ears to hear*  
*or courage to stand*  
*(or is it faith to believe?)*  
*that some mirth is malice.*  
*Yet the invitation comes, and we are to call it what it is:*  
*“Keep your hands to yourself, please.”*  
*“I prefer you not use that word in my presence.”*  
*“I stand with my sister, my brother – for we are one.”*  
*Beelzebub sounds so cherubic*  
*until he is called by name.*

### ***Prayed in the Spirit***

Lord make me an instrument of moral courage,  
where others oppress “just joking,” may I not laugh,  
where others oppress “no offense intended,” may I be firm,  
when others injure without malice, may I rebuke without malice,  
but when others injure “my hand slipped,” may I be willing to report,  
and where I’m the one who oppresses, may I receive rebuke with grace,  
and when I’m the one who injures, may I repent, seeking forgiveness.

O Divine Healer, may I not so much seek  
to oppress as to liberate,  
to injure as to heal,

to justify my prejudice as to proclaim the Year of Jubilee.<sup>xxiii</sup>

For it is in seeking justice that we share your mind,  
it is in loving mercy that we share your heart,  
it is in walking humbly that we share your life in Christ Jesus your Son.

*Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice yourself obscuring truth: saying one thing but meaning another. Notice when you understate or overstate your thoughts, your feelings, or your intentions. How do you respond to an encounter with malice – with silence or violence? What might it look like for you to speak the truth in love? Notice. Pray. Act.

*Voiced in Gospel*

The magi journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, only six miles but a soul's eternity away. The Star led them to the Child, and they were flush with joy. As they entered the home, they beheld the Child and the God-bearer, and fell to their knees. After they worshipped the Child, the magi presented to him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. These gifts were earthly treasures, to be sure, but they also foreshadowed the Storm: royalty, sanctity, Death.

*Interpreted for Heart and Mind*

*Humble the beauty that brings redemption;  
earthens the glory that saves;  
Long the journey of the wise who seeks;  
subtle the Star that leads.*

*Majestic the God-bearer;  
even more the Child.*

*And the gratitude we bring seeks a truth that is  
our joy to proclaim:*

*That in body and in soul,  
in life and in death and in life beyond death,*

*He does not belong to us;  
we belong to him.*

*Prayed in the Spirit*

○ Lord, make me an instrument of gratitude,

when confronted with cruelty, let me show kindness,  
when encountering suffering, let me show solidarity,  
to the grinch, let me speak grace,

to the gumpy, let me live as gracious,

where fear overwhelms, let me pray without ceasing,  
where darkness eclipses, let me shine your Light.

○ Divine Master, may I not so much seek

to get for my own sake as to give for your sake,

to expect the World as to live content that I follow your call,

to demand abundance as to lament the scarcity of the least.

For it is a grateful heart that sings your joy,

it is the giving heart that writes new lyrics,

it is the life of gratitude that opens the melody of the Christ Child.

*Practiced in Life*

**Go into the world...** Notice your expectations. Are others to serve you? Is traffic to clear for you? Do your daily encounters tend toward the transactional? Or do you live and have your being with an openness to each moment? Are you quick to joy? How often do you express thanks? Notice. Pray. Act.

*December 17 – Matthew 2:12-13*

*Voiced in Gospel*

The Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod the Great, so they scampered off, returning to their foreign homes by an unusual route. Once the Magi had left, yet another dream was given in which God's messenger played travel agent, this one to Joseph: "Hurry along with the Child and the God-bearer and flee to Egypt, for Herod is