



1st Sunday in Advent, Year B

Turbulent Hopes

When promises and disappointments mingle, we long for decisive breakthroughs.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“These texts are a reminder to me of the undercurrent of expectation and hope that gives shape to our lives.” Holly Hearon



“While we long for God’s healing presence for us, let us also be patient for God’s grace to be felt within all God’s people.” Helene Tallon Russell



“These readings awaken us to current frustrations and dreams and invite us to trust in God’s own dreams for us.” Charles W. Allen



“As we read these lessons, we need to ponder the connection between turbulent hopes and the birth of a baby in a manger.” Marti Steussy

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Advent begins, says Marti Steussy, amidst turbulent hopes. Like Isaiah, we have all known big promises and big disappointments. The psalmist agrees. Jesus predicts more of the same – big promises, big disappointments. Paul starts his first letter to the church at Corinth with words of promise, but most of the rest of the letter is filled with words of disappointment. Those of us who live and love unconventionally know what it is like to have turbulent hopes. When we come out, we may be at once overjoyed and anxious as we accept that we are not what others expected us to be, not even what we ourselves once expected us to be. Now what? How are we going to get through the daily partial victories and defeats that come from living against the grain? And where is God in all of this?



Think about when you came out to someone, or when someone came out to you. Were there pleasant surprises? Unpleasant ones? Did God seem close or absent?

Isaiah 64:1-9 oscillates between extreme images, says Marti: God as earthquake; God as loving parent or careful artisan; God simply absent; the isolation of no one calling your name; and the consideration that we are all God's people. Helene Russell, Holly Hearon and Charles Allen are equally struck by Isaiah's final admonition in verse 9: "Now consider, we are all your people." For Charles and Holly, the emphasis falls on "all"; for Helene it falls on "your." Charles hears an echo of Moses lecturing God in Exodus 32:11: "*your* people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt." It seems that both Isaiah and Moses have the nerve to remind God of a relationship God ought to know about already. How can we be called unclean if we are God's handiwork?



Think of times when promising events have been followed by setbacks. Same-sex marriages are recognized in some states, but denied by constitutional amendments in others. Can you identify with Isaiah's longing ("O that you would

tear open the heavens and come down,” v. 64:1)?

Marti and Holly both notice how the psalmist in **Psalm 80** seems to assume, like the Deuteronomist, that misfortunes result directly from God’s anger. If that is how we feel, says Marti, then that is from where we need to pray. But we might also consider that God’s connection to what happens on earth is more complex. At a deeper level, the psalmist recognizes that things are not as they should be but refuses to stop hoping that God intends an ultimate good.

Charles notes that Paul’s first words are amazingly complimentary in **1 Corinthians 1:3-9**. Who would ever guess that Paul was about to launch a lengthy critique? He seems confident that the Corinthian church will turn out well, even though they are a long way from that goal right now. Holly notes that the very strengths Paul mentions here — enriched speech, knowledge, and other spiritual gifts — are the liabilities that Paul goes on to criticize when they inhibit genuine community. Those of us who live and love unconventionally are often stereotyped as being especially gifted and creative. This can be a strength if we and those who label us turn our differences into connections, but we and they can also use our differences to create barriers.



Have you ever seen yourself as gifted in ways that those around you may not understand? Have others seen you that way? When has this forged deeper connections, and when has it thwarted connections?

Mark 13:24-37 returns us to Isaiah’s theme of longing for God to tear open the heavens and come down. Jesus’ words seem to imply that turbulence will increase until God suddenly intervenes and settles everything. Both Jesus and his audience seem to assume that God’s decisive intervention cannot be far off — less than a generation away (verse 30). But no such intervention ever happens and we are left with a disclaimer, “no one knows” (verse 32). But if no one really knows what’s about to happen, why are we encouraged to read God’s intervention as “the signs of the times”? Charles observes that we have a double-edged message: “We’re told to keep alert because something momentous is about to happen, and because we do not really know what it will be.” Marti notes, “Jesus has to take his own advice here. He does not know exactly what will happen. But he trusts that it will be something momentous.” Holly points out, “Deep down, our longing for some decisive intervention is more complicated than it looks. We dream of having all our problems solved so that we can face them now without giving up.”

Following the recent elections and voting in the U.S., those who preach these texts on this particular first Sunday in Advent may well be wondering just what got decided at that election. Will we know better how to face the drastic changes in our economy? Will our newly-elected politicians be able to enact any of the programs promised? What are we to do about the defeat of efforts for marriage equality to flourish? We still face big promises and big disappointments.

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How do you read the signs of the times? Do you see things getting better for those whom the church has excluded? Do you see more conflict emerging? What sustains your hope?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*We all long, O God, for greater clarity.
We need our hopes strengthened.
When you do not rend the heavens and come down to vindicate us,
open our eyes to your all-sustaining intimacy with us.
When unfolding events delight and disappoint us,
teach us to embrace them as tokens of your own dream
for a time when cares give space for celebration. Amen.*

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2nd Sunday in Advent, Year B

A Future Filled With Promise

Sometimes an impending future gives us the power and will to embrace the present.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“There are times when the morning news sounds outrageously good. Those times are real. Hold on to them.” Marti Steussy



“It is so easy to focus on the ‘comfort’ in ‘comfort my people’ that we can forget why comfort is needed.” Holly Hearon



“God encourages our continued work for justice and peace – an expression of who we are called to become, as well as to effect positive changes in the world.” Helene Tallon Russell



“Sometimes the future seems filled with promise – thank God!” Charles W. Allen

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The readings for this second week in Advent are more eager about the future than perplexed with the present, in contrast to last week's readings. Isaiah and John the Baptist both call people to prepare God's way. In different ways Psalm 85 and 2 Peter both proclaim that peace is at hand, though still to arrive.

Marti Steussy points out that **Isaiah 40:1-11** reflects an earlier time than last week's reading. Here something new and unprecedented and immeasurably good is about to happen – the long awaited return from exile. Isaiah imagines the equivalent of a superhighway, says Charles Allen, stretching from Babylon to Jerusalem. In the face of this new happening, all things seem possible. Marti recalls the day the Berlin Wall came down – she was at a conference, rooming with a woman from Germany. Those moments are real, and we need to hang onto them, even though there will be lots of gritty slogging to be done once the good news is announced. Those of us who have come out, according to Holly Hearon, experience a return from exile when we reclaim our history, our identities, our stories – all the things that have been scattered or repressed.



Have you lived in exile? Have you returned from exile? Or are you still waiting? What needs to happen next for you?

Who would not like **Psalm 85**? It speaks for itself, says Marti. Helene Russell, Holly and Charles think verse 10 is utterly fabulous: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” Holly likes the image of kissing: it assumes a kind of intimacy, a willingness to be a little vulnerable and a commitment of heart along with mind. Of course in today's world steadfast love and faithfulness have yet to meet, Charles observes, and righteousness and peace are not even holding hands, much less kissing. There is still need for matchmaking, Helene quips; maybe these virtues should subscribe to Chemistry.com.



Think of moments when it seemed that everything was finally coming together. What was that reconciliation like? How long did it last? Is it

happening now? Will it happen again?

Charles hears echoes of Psalm 85 in **2 Peter 3:13-14**, where the author looks for a new heaven and a new earth “where righteousness is at home” and where we “strive to be found by [God] at peace.” 2 Peter 3:8-15a is trying to explain why the promised day of the Lord has not yet arrived. It might take thousands of years! Marti notes that there are a number of Jewish texts from around the same time that offer similar explanations: God wants everybody to be reconciled, no matter how long things have to wait. We are not waiting to escape this world, but for a reconciled world. And while we wait we should live by the same values of that world, not this one. God’s patience *is* our salvation. Holly wonders, if God is waiting for everybody, “How long will everyone else have to wait for me? How long will I have to wait for everyone else? Is there a way we can help each other in this process?” Reconciliation requires repentance, but not repentance from reconciling love, regardless of one’s sexuality.



When others call you to repent, how do you respond? Do you feel pressured into denying the love that has found you? How could turning from love ever bring genuine repentance? What about repenting for *not* following your heart?

Charles notices how easily many of us identify with “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” in **Mark 1:1-8**. Helene concurs. This experience of being a single voice alone and not being heard can leave us feeling discounted and ineffectual. But being such a voice is part of who we are. We cannot afford to let ourselves be silenced. Repentance appears again as a connecting theme between this passage and 2 Peter 3:8-15a, Holly comments, but here it is connected with a “rite of passage,” baptism.

Rituals are important for honoring transitions, a way of marking time and giving such moments a place in our memory. What might such rituals look like among those of us who have come out? What rituals do we already have that help us to recognize that God is present even in the midst of our wilderness and joins with us through the Holy Spirit? Charles suggests that the promised baptism with the Holy Spirit may be what people experience when they come out, recalling that in Acts 10:44-48 a baptism in the Spirit causes Peter to recognize that people he considered impure are as acceptable to God as he is.



Where is your voice? Do you find yourself in the wilderness? Who hears you? Where can you see signs of God’s new community emerging in unexpected places?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*Comfort us, O God.
Speak tenderly to us and prepare our way,
that we may return from our places of exile
and find ourselves clothed in your Spirit,
empowered to comfort other exiles. Amen.*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

3rd Sunday in Advent, Year B

Releasing the Spirit

The Spirit of God empowers us to speak and to hear others speak without quenching honesty or truth.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126 or Luke 1:47-55; 1Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“We need the wisdom to see the Spirit of God resting upon and commissioning us to testify to the light of truth.” Charles W. Allen



“We can be honest about what we see and do not see, what we feel and do not feel.” Marti Steussy



“The ‘theme’ that comes to my mind as I read these texts is discernment. Where and how do we discern the presence of God in our lives?” Holly Hearon



“Let the Spirit’s desire for liberation, shalom and grace overcome our own wisdom as well as our ignorance as it alights on us individually and communally.” Helene Tallon Russell

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Marti Steussy, Holly Hearon and Charles Allen concur that practically anybody will be drawn to the theme of good news to the oppressed in **Isaiah 64**. Surely those of us who are coming out also identify with the brokenhearted, captives or prisoners. Note that there is a social stigma involved with being a captive or prisoner. That means you are an evildoer in the eyes of the more powerful who imprison you – always.

Imprisonment is oppressive to us when we refuse the label of evildoer. And yet God promises not only to release us but also to change that label: “all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom God has blessed” verse 9. Is this happening when courts recognize same-sex marriage? Is this righteousness and praise springing up before all the nations? Let’s not pretend that God’s reign has arrived, or that we can’t turn blessings into curses if we use them to put others down. But for us who are coming out, this is another sign of God’s coming reign, which we still await. Both Holly and Helene are especially drawn to the “dress-up” imagery of verse 10. “Don’t we all like to do that in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community?” asks Holly. In God’s reign, Helene imagines, all will have the fabulous garments of salvation, decked out with the jewels and garments of shalom.



How have you experienced broken-heartedness and captivity? Do you still struggle with your own self-image when others label you an “evildoer”? When have you known release and vindication? What can you do to bring release to others?

Marti notes how **Psalms 126** reminds us that, even after the fortunes of Zion have been restored (as is about to happen in Isaiah’s vision), we may once again wind up sowing in tears and begging God to turn them to joy. It is unrealistic to think that any one moment in life is going to make everything right forever after – but it is also unrealistic to think that there will never again be laughter. Holly finds it healthy never to focus on grief to the exclusion of joy, or joy to the exclusion of grief.

The Revised Common Lectionary offers us the option this week of substituting Mary’s song, the Magnificat, of **Luke 1:46-55** for the psalm. Charles comments that this is not the song of a

“good girl.” By all public criteria, Mary’s condition (as recounted) is scandalous (like the imprisoned in Isaiah). People know where babies come from. You can say it’s the Holy Spirit’s work, but talk is cheap. But, according to the story, God chooses to put the agent of redemption in a disreputable position. And the agent finds the strength to celebrate in a canticle that has been sung (most likely) ever since it was written.

If only people paid attention to the social and political consequences. Marti cautions us to look past the list of simple reversals and imagine instead taking apart the system that divides the world into powerful and lowly, rich and hungry. Holly thinks that the image of scattering the proud in the imagination of their hearts is an example of an image that takes us past simple reversals – we can all benefit when our proud imaginings get a dose of reality. Helene wonders about the significance of singing this. What are our present-day canticles?



Whether you are male or female, transgender or intersex, can you perceive the ways our culture tries to make you into a “good girl”? Where can you turn for the power to resist that pressure? How can you turn that resistance into a blessing, even for the powers you resist?

Holly and her partner Lorna Shoemaker selected **1Thessalonians 5:16-24** as one of the readings at their union ceremony. For Holly it says, “Look for the presence of God in every circumstance; but don’t be too facile in what you ascribe to God – test everything.” You don’t have to accept every voice. This is especially important for the coming-out community. Charles concurs: “Do not quench the Spirit, but test everything – even the words of prophets!” In Paul’s time of religious ferment, “inspired” words had to be tested. If you’re too suspicious, you might quench the Spirit. But you can’t afford to be gullible either. And yet today many Christians are very gullible when we deal with the “inspired” words of the biblical writers. Why? Gullibility quenches the Spirit just as much as suspicion. Critical reflection is not quenching the Spirit, though refusing to listen is. Think of all who have suffered because Christians mostly stopped testing everything. Think of how the Spirit may be quenched when people quote proof-texts to denounce coming-out testimonies. Marti adds a caution about the admonition to rejoice always. It has been too often used to deny the need to grieve genuine losses.



How can you practice “unquenching” the Spirit? How do you listen for truth without becoming too suspicious or too gullible? How has the Spirit spoken in your story so far?

In **John 1:6-8, 19-28**, says Charles, we again meet the theme of the voice crying in the wilderness. John seems to be baptizing without a license. His questioners seem to think this shouldn't be unless something truly remarkable is happening. John says something truly remarkable is about to happen. Isn't it truly remarkable in our day that coming-out folk are able to find words of life and encouragement in a book that most of their brothers and sisters have used against them? For Holly this text underscores the importance of knowing who you are, and who you are not. She is also struck by the religious leaders' desire to place a label on John: "Well, if you aren't this, are you that?" It echoes the way many want to classify those who are coming out as either lesbian or gay – they really don't like those in between places. Sometimes coming-out people show the same intolerance for those who come out differently. Helene and Marti wonder how we can testify to the light without the temptation to believe that we are the light? The metaphor of the light lends itself to showing things as they are – testing and questioning those conclusions. The light guides others and us in the quest for truth, wisdom and liberation.



Who are you? Who are you not? How do labels help or hinder your growing identity? How do friends and family and your faith community make room for you to name yourself?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*Spirit of God,
rest upon us and release us to speak good news
to all who are imprisoned by grief, by others' judgments, by economic
hardship.
Give us voice to sing your praise even in the wilderness,
and the wisdom to let your truth be our light. Amen.*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

4th Sunday in Advent, Year B According To God's Promise

We move from mixed messages into a God-bearing life.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26;](#)
[Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“We may hear mixed messages, but we trust that God will be the God of all people.” Helene Tallon Russell



“Being open to God takes courage and a capacity to see the world slant.” Holly Hearon



“God promises, but God waits upon our consent.” Marti Steussy



“We may question God for God’s sake, but we still trust that God is with us and for us.” Charles W. Allen

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Helene Russell, Marti Steussy and Charles Allen are all struck by the mixed messages of **2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**, especially when read in conjunction with the *whole* of **Psalm 89** (not just the lectionary excerpt). Nathan the prophet presumably speaks for God, says Marti, nonetheless his first reaction to David’s plan to build a temple (do all that you have in mind, for God is with you) is quite different from God’s later opinion about David’s plan! God tells Nathan to tell David that God cannot be bound to a specific house. And yet, Helene comments, God decides to be bound up with David’s house. “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever” (verse 16).

Still, Charles objects, this final promise did *not* come true. David’s throne was not established forever. Taken in this light it is all the more ironic that a portion of **Psalm 89** which appears in today’s readings is festive and upbeat, celebrating God’s promise to David. But this is a setup for the psalmist later to accuse God of breaking that very promise" (verses 38-45). Almost every reassuring statement in the portion read today is contrasted with what actually happens later. Talk about mixed messages!

In many ways, however, we can easily identify with the psalmist. We too have grown up with mixed messages: God loves all of us as we are/God does not love some of us as we are. We are refusing to accept that message of rejection. Likewise, the psalmist refuses to accept God’s apparent rejection, calling God to remember the original promise (verses 49-52). Again, this part of Psalm 89 is not in the lectionary reading, but it is crucial to understanding that psalm in its context, and even more crucial in light of the first lesson.



What are the mixed messages that have shaped your life? How will you choose which ones to heed? Will you find the psalmist’s courage to insist that God remember you?

Paul hints, in **Romans 16:25-27**, that these mixed messages may be resolved in the gospel of Jesus Christ: “the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ... is now disclosed” (verses 25b-

26a). In one way, Charles remarks, that is undoubtedly true for any Christian. On the other hand, what is now disclosed is still a mystery. It is certainly not a promise that our “houses” will never fail, not in light of the crucifixion, says Holly. And Marti points out that Paul too hoped for a final resolution that never quite arrived. Paul has a wonderful vision of a church in which Jew and Gentile (the huge ethnic division in his own worldview) can be “in one mind” with one another in Christ Jesus. But Marti can never read Paul’s words without knowing that his vision did not come to fruition. Divisiveness won in the churches he was speaking to, because “us/them” is a terribly powerful dynamic in human society and in the individual psyche. In a way that’s comforting: our struggles aren’t new. The church has been flawed and broken its whole life long, but it’s still with us. It is flawed and broken now, but the vision it offers is still strong enough to keep us trying, and at moments the love of God breaks through and finds embodiment in ways so powerful that we just can’t give up!



How does the Gospel, the Good News, help you face the mysteries and perplexities in your life? Does the Good News have to make sense, or can it be a mystery too?

Luke 1:26-38 is the story of Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary. Taken with the Magnificat (see last week’s commentary), this is a story of Mary consenting to enter into a disreputable condition, trusting that, despite all appearances, she is entering into holiness. Charles is intrigued by what Luke does not say here. He says that Mary was a virgin when Gabriel showed up. Mary also says that she is a virgin when she asks how this birth is supposed to happen. But Gabriel’s answer seems to skirt the issue. All he says is that, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Most High, the child to be born will be holy, contrary to all expectations. There is nothing about the mechanics of conception here. Luke is passing on a tradition he has heard about Jesus’ “virginal” conception. But his reticence causes Charles to wonder if Luke did not have his own questions about the “how” of her condition. It was a disreputable condition overshadowed by God and thus made holy. But it does not say anything about what DNA testing might reveal. Helene remarks that this could be an important issue to raise, not only because the claim of a virgin birth sometimes creates a stumbling block for thinking Christians whose belief in science inhibits their acceptance of the gospel, but also because it uplifts women struggling in a similar situation – unwed mothers who are shunned by society. The passage is a reminder that God uses people in all sorts of conditions and situations – even those whose conditions smack of what reputable persons, especially Christians, might call sin. God not only uses unwed mothers, but chooses them and sanctifies them. Perhaps these conditions are not really sin, or at least, not in all circumstances, or perhaps God does not use the criteria of sin versus not sin in choosing God’s most valuable players.



Have you ever found holiness where others cried shame? What healing are you bringing to birth in and through your relationships?

Marti sees a marked contrast between the Annunciation and Greco-Roman traditions of divine rape (see for example W. B. Yeats's poem, "[Leda and the Swan](#)"). Instead, in the Annunciation we are shown the vision of a young girl courageous enough to give her consent to a highly irregular divine plan. In answer to Yeats poem, one could quote the exchange between Mary and Gabriel in W. H. Auden's "For the Time Being" [*Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1991) 359-360]. Gabriel says, "Hear, child, what I am sent to tell: Love wills your dream to happen, so Love's will on earth may be, through you, No longer a pretend but true ... What I am willed to ask, your own Will has to answer; child, it lies Within your power of choosing to Conceive the Child who chooses you." Mary answers, "My flesh in terror and fire Rejoices that the Word Who utters the world out of nothing, As a pledge of His word to love her Against her will, and turn Her desperate longing to love, Should ask to wear me, From now to their wedding day, For an engagement ring."

What Gabriel asks of Mary is what God asks of each of us in a different way, says Charles. It lies within our power of choosing to conceive the God who chooses us. We all stand with Mary, summoned to an adventure filled with peril and misunderstanding and mystery and unspeakable grief and joy.



What lies within our power of choosing? We may not choose our loves, but how will the loves that choose us bring us into a new world?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*You call us your own, O God,
and promise faithfulness.
Hear our cries when we feel deserted,
draw us into your shameless love for all people,
and let it be with us according to your word. Amen.*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Christmas Eve, Year B

Welcome to a Room-For-All Christmas

This Christmas our proclamation moves beyond the humble manger to the “grace upon grace” of God’s cosmic presence in the flesh of Christ and in our flesh. Injustice is interrupted. Worship flourishes and hope lives – even in the midst of uncertain times, ruined cities and fearful lives.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4 \(5-12\); John 1:1-14](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“For all of us who have felt less than full acceptance from our own people, the Christ is God’s gift whose grace and truth enlightens the world about how we are fully loved.” Donna M. Prince



“When your faith is challenged and battered, hear the songs of angels pointing beyond yourself to the permanence of God’s love.” Julia Mayo-Quinlan



“How welcome are all the messengers who bring words of peace and hope and salvation to transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual persons who have been oppressed, denied, destroyed.” Judith Hoch Wray

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Psalm 98 calls for worship beyond simply singing the old Christmas songs that we have been taught. Only a new song will do – a song of victory and vindication, a song that embodies all the arts, diverse music instruments, and the harmonics of the universe. The impetus for this new song is divine justice, the equity of God's judgment, the equality of God's love. This Christmas eve, we sing, not "Away in a Manger" but "Away with the Anger, God's Justice Is Done!"



What new lyrics would you like to sing this Christmas? What words and music does the word need to hear? How do we create worship that embodies justice and equity?

Isaiah 52:7-10 offers hope of restoration, not only to Jerusalem of old, but also to those whose lives seem to be in ruins today. Preachers and all hearers of the word are called to "Listen!" – listen for the good news of salvation: "Your God reigns!" How welcome will be the messengers who bring words of peace and hope and salvation to those who have been oppressed, denied, destroyed. The words come in the midst of the ruins, not *after* everything is alright. This Christmas message is one of worship and celebration. Bring and celebrate with your feet, your voices, your arms, your eyes. What a valuable word for the LGBT community: even before we see equality in our nation, we proclaim that our God reigns. Keep looking and listening and working together. And sing for joy while we wait.



What words will convey the good news of salvation to transgender, bisexual, lesbian, and gay persons? Who are the messengers who proclaim that good news today?

Hebrews 1:1-12 includes one of the most carefully written statements in the New Testament (verse 1-4), introducing readers/hearers to the unparalleled superiority of Christ and setting the stage for the rest of the sermon we know as the epistle to the Hebrews. Here, everything else in human life, in creation, and in the heavens pales in contrast to Christ. When one's faith is battered, it is good to hear the angels again and know that even these strains of praise fall short of describing the gift that is Christ.



When God’s messengers fall short of the proclamation of God’s majesty and gift in Christ, how will transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual people hear of God’s love and grace? In what ways can you make this Christmas a celebration of the Incarnation, the fullness of God in human form, for all people?

Maintaining the integrity of John’s proclamation of the Incarnation found in **John 1:1-18** may be very challenging for many preachers on Christmas Eve. This narrative about the Incarnation, about God’s becoming flesh and living among us, is not your standard Christmas story. No shepherds – shepherds belong to Luke’s story. No magi – magi belong to Matthew’s story. No manger. Neither census nor crowded guest quarters. No angels here or flight to Egypt.

Instead, we encounter the cosmic Word, the Light, the Wisdom (Sophia), who enters into the world as flesh. Nothing can remain the same ever again. This proclamation incarnate, in flesh and blood, now brings life and light that can never be overcome. No one is excluded here. The passage is full of expansive affirmations: this Gift of God, the Light that the darkness has never overtaken, is for “all people” (verse 4), so that “all that received” Christ might be empowered (verse 12) to become God’s children. From God’s “fullness” we have “all” received (verse 16)! Thus the Christmas proclamation this year from John’s gospel is about room-for-all, rather than no room at the inn. Life and light, divine access and grace-filled flesh belong to all.



What kind of Christmas celebration is called forth by this “room-for-all” passage from John? How will LGBT persons be included more fully in your liturgy and proclamation? As a transgender, lesbian, gay, or bisexual person, where do you see yourself in this new kind of Christmas?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*Magnificent, Cosmic God,
you who have come to us in flesh and blood,
thank you for the Gift of Christ
who fills all and encompasses all of us.
Thank you for the Word who assures us that
the Light will never be overcome by the darkness.
Amen.*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

2nd Sunday after Christmas, Year C

Wisdom, Made Particular

Christmas celebrates the Living Word and Woman Wisdom of God, making her home in our particularity

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Jeremiah 31:7-14](#) or [Sirach 24:1-12](#); [Psalm 147:12-20](#) or [Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21](#); [Ephesians 1:3-14](#); [John 1:\(1-9\) 10-18](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“Real life particularity does not sit easily with everyone.” Greg Carey

“To follow Jesus means living out one’s own truth – regardless of the resistance one faces.”
Mykal Slack



“On this second Sunday after Christmas, when we have anticipated and celebrated the birth of Jesus, in these passages Scripture celebrates our birth through Jesus Sophia who has been present at the very beginning of creation.”
Mona West

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The prologue to the Gospel of John (**John 1:1-18**) famously moves from the cosmic to the particular, from a time before time to the specificity of the Word who “became flesh and lived among us.” This is the story of Christmas, the birth narrative of humanity: God’s eternal Wisdom makes its home among real, flesh and blood mortals.

The Word (*Logos* in Greek) of John’s gospel points forward to Jesus, even as it points backward to the tradition of Woman Wisdom. In this tradition, Woman Wisdom dwells in God’s presence from the beginning. Wisdom provides that creation with rationality, so that true seekers may discern the divine nature in the workings of the world. But Wisdom does not hold herself removed from humanity. She identifies a particular people, Israel, and delivers them to a new land. She even seeks out individual persons, those willing to pursue Wisdom rather than Folly.



The biblical figure of Woman Wisdom explores feminine imagery as it relates to God. Does your congregation use a variety of images and language to speak about God and God’s activity?

Such is the way of God’s Wisdom, which expresses itself in human particularity. According to **Sirach 24:1-12**, Wisdom springs forth from the mouth of the Most High, yet she takes root in God’s particular people. Having searched through heaven and the abyss, across sea and earth, Woman Wisdom sets her tent in Israel.

Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21 continues Wisdom’s progress toward particularity. Choosing an oppressed people, she delivers them from their oppressors, guides them through their journey, and protects them from their foes. Who can silence her praise? The mute speak forth; infants articulate the good news. This is Wisdom’s role in salvation history: from the foundation of the world, she makes her home among a particular people.



Who can silence Wisdom’s praise? What forces in our world seek to silence Wisdom, and who speaks in solidarity with her?

Taking up the theme, **Ephesians 1:3-14** (all one Greek sentence, by the way!) proclaims how God has delivered every spiritual blessing to a particular people, God’s own adopted children. These particular blessings reflect God’s eternal purpose, prepared before the foundation of the world. God’s Wisdom will find its ultimate resolution: to gather up all things in Christ.

Real life particularity does not sit easily with everyone. John's prologue recognizes this harsh reality, as the Word finds itself rejected in its chosen home. Likewise, as a gender transcending male, Mykal recalls a faith community that continually poses the question, "Are you livin' right?" Mykal discerns that "living right" is directly related to having full access to all the benefits that the world has to offer. Mykal testifies that if you break the rules or live outside the boundaries of popular discourse and understanding, access to those benefits is denied.

Mona recalls the early Christian tradition that saw Jesus as Wisdom's Child. On this second Sunday after Christmas, when we have anticipated and celebrated the birth of Jesus, in these passages Scripture celebrates our birth through Jesus Sophia (don't forget Julian of Norwich called Jesus our Mother) who has been present at the very beginning of creation. To follow Jesus, Mykal testifies, implies living out one's own truth – regardless of the resistance one faces.

Not only is Jesus Wisdom's Child, but through God's Word/Wisdom so are we. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender believers bear witness that it is not the church who says whether or not we are God's children, nor our sexuality, not even our theology or orthodoxy – but it is our welcome of this one sent from God. The Logos/Sophia does not discriminate based on race, class, gender or sexual orientation.



How does "the Word" of God take particular shape in your community?

During the Christmas season the LGBT community and its allies celebrate God's eternal Wisdom who makes her home in the particularity of mortals. We testify to God's Word, who lived the divine love despite violent resistance. We affirm our identity as Wisdom's beloved children, who participate in God's saving work to bring all things together.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Holy Wisdom, Holy Word:

You arrive among us in the messiness of our particularity.

In Jesus, Wisdom's Child, Word Made Flesh,

*You have taken on what we are
and made us yours.*

So empower us to embrace

*our particularity, to honor the particularity of others,
honestly, compassionately, courageously –
and with wisdom. Amen.*

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