



2018 Advent Meditations



Many thanks to all who contributed to this
Christ's Episcopal Church
Advent Devotional Booklet.

We hope you and your families find these
meditations a blessing during this Advent season.

Sunday, December 2

Psalm 25:1-9

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36



Father Brian Winter - Rector

We all want to know when the Lord might be coming back, don't we? We hear that in our Gospel for today from Luke, of signs to look for as we await, "the Son of Man coming in a cloud."

As we enter this time of Advent, it is a time to prepare and a time to be watchful, not only for the baby Jesus in 20 some days, but also for the second coming of Christ. What strikes me about this second coming is that if we are always looking up in the clouds waiting for the "Son of Man" to come again, then we very well might miss him right here amongst us. So many times we are looking for God to break into our lives in a loud and flashy way, we miss those subtle whispers of God touching our lives and visiting us every day.

I truly believe that this is what Advent is about, looking for and finding God breaking into our lives in the simple and ordinary moments of daily life. Most of the people around the manger I am sure just saw a child, radiant and simple. Yes, there were the enlightened ones like Mary and Joseph, the wise men, and the angels above who saw so much more, but for many it was a child, born in a manger, and it was not until later they realized the depth of that moment.

Today, I invite you to take your eyes from the clouds and look into the faces of the people around you and within them, find God's love and glory breaking into the world. Be alert at all times, but also be hesitant, for sometimes God is but a whisper. I pray that the reflections in this book will be a wonderful journey through Advent for you.

What a great gift this booklet is for all of us; thank you to those who have made it possible by writing their reflections, to the Daughters of the King for putting this booklet together, and to our Parish Admin, Ash, for final edits and publishing.

Monday, December 3

Psalm 122

Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 8:5-13

Kathy Mordeaux



It is hard to have faith in the wake of tragedies like the recent shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. When innocent people are shot down in the midst of a peaceful service of worship, or at a school, or a concert, or a shopping mall, we ask, Why does this keep happening? What is wrong with our world?

And yet, faith is clearly the call of today's gospel. But it's not a passive faith that is called for here, but an active one, a faith in our ability to be vessels for the work of the Spirit, present and active in our world. Like the centurion who goes out to find Jesus and appeal to him for healing, we need to seek actively the healing we need, the healing our world needs. We need to initiate the serious conversations about violence, mental health, the culture of hate, that wreaks such destruction in our world. It has to start with us, all of us. We have to confront the hate and division in our own hearts and begin to reach out in love and acceptance to those who worship differently, look differently, vote differently, live differently than we do. And, together, look for ways to find unity and compassion.

As we begin to beat our own swords into plowshares, we can find hope, and begin to bring about the change our world needs. In that work is the ground of our faith in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to bring healing to a lost and lonely world.

Tuesday, December 4

Psalm 2:1-8

Isaiah 11:1-10

Luke 10:21-24

Mary Brooks



Isaiah 11:2-3.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him -
The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding;
The Spirit of counsel and of power,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord,
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

What gifts we have to tap into when we call upon the Holy Spirit! I ask myself, "How can I make use of the attributes of the Holy Spirit during this expectant waiting period?". I am not a good "waiter". I admit I lack patience.

As I await the child to be born, I am searching for ways to meet the poor, the oppressed, the alone and the lonely with wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and reverence of the baby, my King. The search is often short. The needy surround me.

Wednesday, December 5

Psalm 23

Isaiah 25:6-9

Mathew 15:29-30



Julie Dadlani

This year I went through the Confirmation process and was confirmed on April 7th, 2018 by Bishop Robert O’Neill at St. John’s Cathedral in Denver Colorado.

On that cool but sunny day, as the procession was being lead into the Cathedral, this overwhelming feeling came over me. I felt like a Sheep being led to My Shepherd when actually I was being led to the Lord.

It was a feeling of comfort and protection and I knew in that moment that God would give me everything I will ever need for all the days of my life. As my Lord and Savior, he would give me strength, joy, and protect me from all evil.

Jesus is with us always and feeds us with Spiritual food.
Christ is the food of our soul.

All I had to do was put my complete trust in him - that was his promise to us.

Trust him and we will be saved.

As my heart felt like it was going to burst, filled with the Holy Spirit, I looked ahead and saw Bishop O’Neill standing in front of me holding a Staff. We were his flock coming toward him being led and guided by our Savior Jesus Christ.

That’s when I knew in my heart that I was surrounded with Gods unending love, protection, and salvation.

Thursday, December 6

Psalm 118:19-24

Isaiah 26:1-6

Matthew 7:21-27



Marci Stanley

Psalm Theme: Praise to God for His Everlasting Mercy.

Jesus is the gate or door through which the righteous may enter through. We give Him all thanks and praise, as He has heard us and has become our salvation.

Although Jesus was rejected by many of His people, He refers to “The stone the builders rejected has become the ‘capstone’, the most important part of the church.” The capstone is the center stone in the top of an arch, holding the whole arch together. Even the Lord was rejected, He was elevated to the right hand of God. Only God could do this marvelous and unexpected work. The Cross, the symbol of Jesus’ rejection, has become the symbol of our salvation.

Verse 24 is a most familiar and popular verse that many of us know: This is the day that the Lord has made:

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

These are day when the last thing we want to do is rejoice. Our mood is down, our situation is out of hand, and our sorrow or guilt is overwhelming. We can relate to the writers of the psalms who often felt this way.

But no matter how low the psalmists felt, they were always honest with God. And as they talked to God, their prayers ended in praise. When you don’t feel like rejoicing, tell God how you truly feel. You will find that God will give you a reason to rejoice. God has given you this day to live and serve Him. **BE GLAD!**

Friday, December 7

Psalm 27:1-6, 17-18

Isaiah 29:17-24

Matthew 9:27-31

Alec Nesbitt



As we all know, King David began life as a shepherd. He wasn't royal. He *became* royal as a fulfillment of prophesy and necessity. Throughout his reign, Israel was constantly beset by enemies, as it had been for centuries and would continue to be. David's innate wisdom and unwavering faith became the pillars of Israel's survival.

David was also an intellectual giant, the author of many if not most of the Psalms – perhaps the greatest body of poetry in the history of civilization – while governing a stubborn, unruly people while *also* leading them in almost constant battle for their very survival. Yet he was flawed as a man and as a king, and he knew it and was quick to admit it. In my opinion, he was one of the greatest persons to have lived.

Psalm 27 is a towering testament to his faith. In the face of never ending threats of betrayal and invasion, he constantly invoked the power of faith. Indeed, in his 27th Psalm, he quotes a verse from his 23rd, praying that he would “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life”.

Psalm 27 is an all-too-human, one-sided dialogue with God, in which David promises to seek the face of the Lord while declaring the Lord to be his salvation. Given the dire circumstances within which he reigned, the King had little recourse but to trust in the Lord for he could hardly trust any mortal.

We of the modern world are easily lulled by our lives of relative order and comfort, yet we're as vulnerable as the Israelites ruled by David. We have but to see that truth – and, through David's exquisitely written prompts, to put our own trust in the Lord – for whoever else *can* we trust?

Saturday, December 8

Psalm 147:1-12

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5-8



Linda Pietrzak

A famine of bread is not so great a judgment
as a famine of the word of God.

Imagine if we did not have God’s word to guide us, to comfort us,
to challenge us. Surely, we could physically feast on an abundant
meal. But how empty our hearts without the word of God - the
food that spiritually sustains us.

As I grow more in my faith, I find myself fed by scripture.
Learning the different perspectives of those in the New
Testament and the wisdom of those in the Old Testament.
What I cherish most about my Episcopal faith is that we are
allowed to ask questions. In prayer, I am allowed to explore
where the scripture melds with my life – where I am? What
am I called to do? Who am I called to share this “meal” with?
My conversation with God fills me and guides me.

I am so appreciative and thankful for God’s wisdom to feed me
knowing what I need, not pushing more than I can consume or
understand. But leave me just a little hungry - wanting just a
bit more, to grow, learn, gain perspective and reflect what I
have learned into the world around me - to go out and help to
feed others.

As we move through Advent - anticipating, waiting, preparing
for the birth of Jesus – may you be fed. And may you share
the wonderful spiritual bounty that God provides with those
around you. To those you know and love and more
importantly to those who need to be fed by God’s word.
need to be fed by God’s word.

Sunday, December 9

Canticle 4
Malachi 3:1-4
Luke 3:1-6



Father Harold Warren

On this Second Sunday of Advent, the central figure is John the Baptist and his call to repentance and preparation for the Day of Judgment.

Canticle 4 (page 50 BCP) known as the Song of Zechariah is, in fact, a direct quote from Scripture (Luke 1:68-79). This passage is a beautiful promise of the “dawn” coming when God fulfills his purpose to bless humankind. In the passage from Malachi, we hear the harsh prophecy that God is sending a messenger to warn us that the Day of Judgment is coming. Finally, in the reading from Luke we are introduced to John the Baptist, “a voice crying in the wilderness.”

Taken as a whole, these Scriptural passages present us with a clarion call to repentance. What is repentance? Repentance, from the Greek word *metanoia*, means to turn around and go in a new direction. Fred Buechner, the gifted spiritual writer, suggests, “Repentance means coming to your senses. It is not so much something you do as something that is given. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying I'm sorry and much more time looking to God and saying thank you.”

Monday, December 10

Psalm 85:8-13

Isaiah 35:1-10

Luke 5:1



Father Harold Warren

In Psalm 85, the psalmist presents an oracle of assurance. God is praised and thanksgiving is offered at the anticipation of deliverance. The Psalmist mentions the word righteousness which, if understood correctly, means being in a “right relationship with God”. In the Isaiah passage, the people suffering in exile are promised that God is about to come and act. The Lord will come to restore the land and revive the people. Finally, in the passage from Luke, we read the account of the healing of the paralytic. It demonstrates Jesus' power to heal and the growing conflict between the Scribes and Jesus. It raises the key question as to who precisely is this Jesus - healer, teacher, wonder worker or God? For the paralytic healed, all that mattered was, he was lame and now he can walk.

Each of these passages is addressed to people in dire need - lame, sick, exiled, suffering, hopeless. Then suddenly there is good news! God himself has promised to come and save, restore and renew. It is a vision of hope and a new beginning.

Together, these passages speak to the message of Advent. God is coming. The effect of His coming is beautifully expressed in the powerful prayer in our prayer book (BCP, pg. 280).

“ . . . let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are being brought to their perfection through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

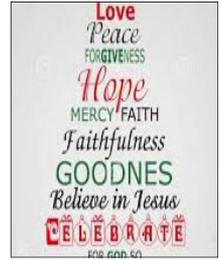
Tuesday, December 11

Psalm 96

Isaiah 40: 1-11

Matthew 18:12-14

Kay Finlaw



The prophets of the Old Testament thought the Messiah would be a king like David or Solomon, a traditional king who would rule from his royal throne in a magnificent palace. From this position of power, he would surely protect the Jews from further persecution. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms”... a comforting message, indeed.

In Matthew, Jesus explains that God loves us like the shepherd loves his sheep; even if (and more accurately, when) we’ve gone astray, he will look for us and welcome us back into the fold with rejoicing ... comfort again.

Here’s hoping the Advent season brings us not only the joy of heightened anticipation, but also the “fear not” kind of peace and comfort the angel expresses to the shepherds when telling them that the Messiah, not a king but a newborn baby in a lowly manger, has finally come.

Wednesday, December 12

Psalm 103:1-10

Isaiah 40:25-31

Matthew 11:28-30



Prepare ye the way
Prepare ye the way
for the Lord

Arlene Armata

How blessed I am to read, reflect and write on the above scriptures, each of which repeatedly assures us of our Lord's love for us and His forgiveness of all of our sins.

I have read and heard that many, many times in my life, and in thinking back, I remember times where I took it upon myself to "work things out" without reaching out to our Lord. How much better if I had stopped and prayed for guidance before taking what I thought were the necessary steps. I wonder now why I didn't do that, as when I have talked to our Lord about what to do in difficult times or situations, the results were that I made better decisions and with a full heart.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Thursday, December 13

Psalm 145:1-4, 8-13

Isaiah 41:13-20

Matthew 11:7-15

Sharon Dwinnell



How do I relate to these readings from Psalms, Isaiah, and Matthew? Matthew says "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

We need to find time in our busy lives to sit quietly and listen to what God is saying to us. Not my forte! I am not good at sittings still. My time to listen is at night after I have gone to bed.

The psalm says that the Lord is abounding in steadfast love. Isaiah says "For I the Lord your God hold your right hand." It is I who say to you "Fear not, I will help you." This particularly speaks to me as He has held my hand and helped me to deal with the death of my beloved son. I had a neighbor who lost his wife to early onset Alzheimers disease. He blamed God for her death and was bitter and angry with God for the remainder of his life. He had been a churchgoer and never went near a church again. So terribly sad. If only he had taken the time to listen to his God. I know that God did not take my son. Cancer did. In fact, I believe that God wept with me when he died so young and my God is there to help me deal with this impossibly difficult time. "For I the Lord your God hold your right hand. It is I who say to you Fear not. I will help you."

Friday, December 14

Psalm 1

Isaiah 48:17-19

Matthew 11:16-19



Father Al Miller

1 Thes. 2:8 "...So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very selves, because you have become very dear to us."

It has always been true that getting to know people, who they are, what makes them tick – makes all the difference. Even the moments where family disagreements can be difficult and divisive, it is in the knowing each other "dearly" that we push forward to find care, love and hope.

The gospel cannot help but to be shared when we are endeared to others. Our love of God will be borne in our actions, and indeed our actions will speak louder than our words. Authenticity between word and action is often the measure of our faith.

In order to share the gospel that is within us, empathy will be a core value. Working at creating relationships where people become dear to us may be the best form of evangelism there is. Who do you need to empathize with? Who in your circle of influence needs to become dear, so that the light of the gospel within may shine forth? Is there someone who needs a friend right now? Dare I say, "be the gospel"?

Saturday, December 15

Psalm 80:1-3, 14-18

Sirach 48:1-11

Matthew 17:9-13



Cathy Van Slyke

One definition of Advent is the time for preparation and waiting for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas as well as the return of Jesus at the second coming. The term is a version of the Latin word meaning "coming".

We sing "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" during our service. Therefore, we anticipate Christ's coming. Thinking about Advent started a thought process of whether we choose to prepare for the celebration of the Nativity and the return of Christ or simply wait. The partial quotes below may indicate we should prepare.

Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 48:10-11. ¹⁰ you who are ready at the appointed time, it is written, to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the heart of the father to the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. ¹¹Blessed are those who saw you, and those who have been adorned in love; for we also shall surely live.

God has given us choices. We can choose to prepare and have our hearts and minds open with love. Or we can choose to simply wait. Some believe God's will is written in the scriptures, therefore our preparation may be in vain.

Sunday, December 16

Canticle 9

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Luke 3:7-18

Cheri Winter



Surely, it is God who saves me...

Canticle 9 has always resonated with me, but I have grown in my understanding of it as I have traveled my journey of faith. At 8 years old, I stood in front of my church family and made a public confession of faith, telling them that I wanted to be “saved” – to accept Jesus as my Savior. What I believed then was that in being “saved” I would not really die, but live forever in Heaven. At 8 years old, dying seemed a long way off - what was I supposed to do in the meantime? I knew I was supposed to be nice to my little brother, pray, read my Bible, ... and wait.

Years later, I was introduced to the practice of “praying in the cracks,” meaning that prayer is to be an ongoing conversation with God, not just in church or during the time of day I have set aside for prayer and study. Cracks are the small spaces of time that happen while standing in line, sitting at a stoplight, or walking into a meeting. This practice has made me more aware of God in the present moment, allowing God to be part of my response to the world around me; these cracks allow me to breathe in God’s presence. When I become anxious or am about to make a rash decision and no crack is to be found, I create one, because even a crack the length of a breath is big enough to let God’s calming presence wash over me.

Canticle 9 reminds me that God is my Savior right now, in this moment, because by trusting God and asking God to be present in my life, I can get through whatever life throws my way. I invite you to pray in the cracks of your day and discover the saving presence of God that is with you always.

Monday, December 17

Psalm 71:1-8

Genesis 49:2, 8-10

Matthew 1:1-7, 17



Judi Huskins

I turn to God on a daily basis. I pray to let myself catch my breath be it from news in the world to frustrations in the day. Turning to the Lord strengthens my heart, my soul, and gives me grace to continue through all troubles. The references to God being a "refuge and fortress " describes to me what I sought for so long in the world and never realized I would find in God's care.

When I put my cares in His hands, I find peace, receive joy, and feel love and gratitude for those around me. I can see that when I am scared or confused, the answer is with God. I may not know what it is right away, but I know it serves his purpose.

Tuesday, December 18

Psalm 72:11-18

Jeremiah 23:5-8

Matthew 1:18-25



Michael Czerwinski

All of these readings are filled with excitement of great news that magically and pleasantly takes me to the most Blessed Act of Love that God ever promised us ... our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For he shall deliver the needy. An excellent reason for man's submission to the Lord Christ; it is not that they dread his overwhelming power, but because they are run over by his just and non condescending rule. Give your love of justice to the king, O God, and righteousness to the king's son. Help him judge your people in the right way; let the poor always be treated fairly.

Wednesday, December 19

Psalm 71:1-8

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25

Luke 1:5-25

Karen Hupp



The reading from Judges tells us about the announcement by an angel to the wife of Manoah, who was barren, that she would bear a son. She bore a son and named him Samson. The readings from Luke tell of an angel appearing to Zachariah announcing the that his wife Elizabeth, barren and elderly, would bare a son to be named John. Both men, the scripture says, were blessed by God. Sampson began the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines. John, known as John the Baptist, helped turn many of the children of Israel to God. In Psalm 71, the elderly psalmist declares that the Lord is his rock, hope and from his mother's womb his strength. Thus, he will sing his praises forever.

As an elder, I take comfort in these readings and realize that God's timings often are a mystery. It is never too late to realize your dreams, to succeed in new adventures or take on new challenges and responsibilities. God is my rock, hope and strength and has been so from my birth. I, like the psalmist, reside in joy and praise.

Thursday, December 20

Psalm 24
Isaiah 7:10-14
Luke 1:26-38

Libby Smith



As this psalm says, “Wake up, you sleepyhead city! Wake up you sleepyhead people! King-Lord is ready to enter.”

And Isaiah says, “So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway. Watch for this: A girl who is presently a virgin will get pregnant. She'll bear a son and name him Immanuel (God-With-Us).”

Then we read the story in Luke of the angel bringing this astonishing news to Mary, which shook her to her core.

God is very good at that when we are being sleepyheads.

What in your core needs — and is waiting — to be shaken?

Friday, December 21

Psalm 24
Song of Solomon
Luke 1:39-45



Pat Fischer

John leapt for joy in the presence of his Lord. Earlier David ‘danced before the Lord with all his might’. The Psalmist tells us to ‘shout for joy’.

During this Advent season, as we have prepared for the coming of the Christ Child, now we can sing in thanksgiving, in celebration, in remembrance, and in proclamation of the promise made to our ancestors.

Like Mary and Elizabeth, this is the time for us to indulge in unadulterated, celebratory joy in the promises that come to us in Jesus.

Jesus, the child Mary is carrying, is recognized by the child in Elizabeth’s womb - John leaps in recognition of the one whom both mothers revere as ‘Lord’. (John himself was of miraculous origin from an elderly mother.)

The Good News of God reveals His presence in the most common things of human life: two housewives who visit each other to help one another. Visit, joy, pregnancy, children, mutual help, house, family: Luke wants us to see precisely this, and to discover in this, God’s presence in the most common things of life!

Let us ask, that we may also be full of joy because Jesus is near!

Saturday, December 22



Canticle 16 – Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)
1 Samuel 1:19-28
Luke 1:46-56

Shari Kissane

Three faithful women, old and young, are blessed with God-given children. Hannah, sad and desperate, calls on God in prayer for a child. She promises to dedicate her child to God. God grants her plea, she honors her pledge. Hannah brings Samuel to the temple where she prayed for his birth, to the care of the priest. 1 Samuel 2 begins with Hannah's song of praise and joy.

Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, childless and aging, understands the amazing gift of answered prayer as the angel announces their coming child. Zechariah, struck dumb during Elizabeth's pregnancy, doubted the possibility of a child at his age. John is born, and on the day of circumcision, he is named. Elizabeth announces his name is John. Zechariah confirms the choice. Zechariah is immediately able to speak! The prophecy of the Messiah and the role his son would play in preparing the world for this glorious event are the first words Zechariah utters!
“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.”

Mary, young and yet unmarried, is visited by the angel Gabriel announcing her role in the birth of the Messiah! The angel shares the miracle of Elizabeth's pregnancy stating “nothing is impossible with God.” Mary answers, “Here I am.” She travels to see Elizabeth where Mary shares her Song of Praise. Mary declares her great joy and appreciation for God's love and trust. God personally cares for us and acts to redeem and save! God's love is unique and worthy of praise, it is faithful and gracious. “For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.” Psalm 33:4

Let us take time before celebrating the birth of Jesus to sing our own song of joy! Recall the amazing gifts of faith, promise, family, healing, consolation and hope we each have experienced in our lives. Look to the examples we have in the readings appointed for today. “Sing to him, sing praise to him: tell of all his wonderful works.” Psalm 105:3

Sunday, December 23

Psalm 25:1-14
Malachi 3:1-5
Luke 1:57-66



Linda Tyler

As I read these three readings from the Bible, I found a common thread, FAITH.

The Psalmist is praising God and asking for divine guidance and forgiveness. He has faith that God's word will be fulfilled, and that without Him, we can do nothing.

Malachi is promising a future messenger to come. One who will "prepare the way", for the Lord's coming. I'm impressed with the faith the prophets in the Old Testament had and those that would believe and follow them. In this case, it seems Malachi was describing John the Baptist who became one of the greatest prophets. John was faithful to his calling and preached the need for repentance and predicted the coming of the Messiah. We have hindsight now. We know the story. I think it's much easier to have faith in God. I have to wonder if all this was happening now, if I would believe the prophets. Would I heed their warnings and predictions or would I think them a little "off course" in need of a therapist maybe?

And then comes Zacharias. When he was told his wife would have a son, and he doubted, he was made unable to speak until the day of his baby's circumcision. When he agreed with his wife Elizabeth, that the baby was to be called "John", "His mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God." His faith and obedience cured him and he found the Lord's favor again.

Faith is so important in our lives and letting God take the lead can give us such peace. We need to remember God daily in prayer and thank him for the gift of his son.

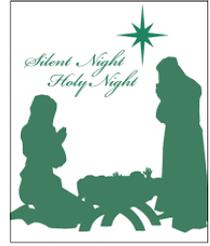
Monday, December 24

Psalm 89:1-4,19-29

2 Samuel 7:1-16

Luke 1:67-79

Cindy Gardner



The Psalm reading explores the relationship between God and David and establishes that David's descendants will fulfill God's covenant and send the world a savior.

In Luke 1, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and his ability to speak is returned to him after the birth of his son. He then prophesied that God is fulfilling his covenant with David and sending a savior to us. His son, John, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for he will go before the Lord, our savior, to prepare his ways.

These readings speak of the dawn of a new age just as Christmas Eve is the start of a new age with the birth of Jesus!

Let us prepare our hearts for this glorious gift!

“By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in
the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

O, Holy Night.

This is the night of our dear Savior's birth!



Christ's Episcopal Church
615 Fourth Street
Castle Rock, CO 80104
(303) 688-5185

info@christsepiscopalchurch.org
www.christsepiscopalchurch.org