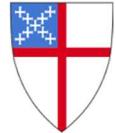




Second Sunday of Advent

Advent Reflection, the Rev. David Owren, Dec. 7, 2025
Lessons and Carols



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Friends in Christ,

There is a story about a guy who is walking down a street when he falls into a hole. The walls are so steep, he can't get out. A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, "Hey you, can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a priest comes along, and the guy shouts up "Father, I'm down in this hole, can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a friend walks by. "Hey Joe, it's me, can you help me out?" And the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says, "Are you stupid? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

Jesus is called Immanuel, "God with us!" This is the hope of the first Christmas and this the same hope of Advent today. "We are in a dark hole. But God has been down here before, in the struggle, in the suffering, in the grief, in the loss, and in the disappointment. And God knows the way out."¹

We live between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. We are called to prepare for the second coming of Christ by John the Baptizer who admonishes us to repent and get a new life; to change our ways for God's way. Barbara Brown Taylor says, "Once upon a time, the vocabulary of new life included such words as sin and salvation, penance and repentance, but these days we do not seem to be able to say them without stammering. We are more comfortable with words such as sickness and health, love and acceptance. These words place no blame, impute no fault, expect no change, except the change from feeling bad to feeling better, as we are forgiven for being exactly who we are."²

The Greek word for repentance is metanoia, literally "transformation of mind." St Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, "be transformed by the renewal of your mind." And The classic second

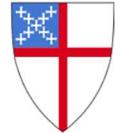
¹ [Peter White](https://www.thesabbathlife.com), December 12, 2019, www.thesabbathlife.com.

² Quoted by Leonard Vander Zee, Advent 2A:Shedding Your Skin, cepreaching.org/written-sermons. This reflection contains insights and material presented by Leonard Vander Zee.



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century Christian letter called “the Shepherd” says, “Repentance is great understanding.” Repentance is not wallowing in guilt or beating ourselves up. Repentance is insight!³ It’s seeing ourselves as we really are: humans who need a way out of the holes of our own making.

“Repentance is knowing that God never gives up on us, and so we must never give up on ourselves. Repentance means turning from the despair that we’re stuck with our past, with its habits and memories, to the hope of fresh new beginning every single day of our lives.”⁴ God does not pass us by. God does not dismiss our predicaments. God does not ignore us. God is Immanuel—God with us! We are never alone. We are never forgotten. We are never lost. God is in the hole with us and Jesus knows the way out!

A second grade teacher once told how he produced a Christmas pageant. After much thought, he said, I gave out the various parts for the pageant. One challenge was Ralph. He was a special needs student who was nine years old and very large. Besides being big, he was clumsy and slow-moving. He was well-liked by all the children, especially the younger ones and he acted as their natural protector.

Ralph wanted to be a shepherd with a flute. I told him I had a more important role for him. As the innkeeper, I reasoned, he would not have too many lines to remember. His size would make his refusal of lodging to Joseph more impressive. We practiced and practiced, each child feeling their importance to the success of the evening. No one in the audience or on the stage was more caught up in the magic of that night than Ralph.

The play progressed without any major mishaps until Joseph appeared, walking slowly, tenderly helping Mary to the door of the inn. He knocked hard on the wooden door. Ralph was ready and waiting.

"What do you want?" he cried out, pushing the door open with a rude gesture.

"We are looking for lodgings."

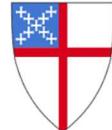
³ Ibid.

⁴ Leonard Vander Zee, Advent 2A:Shedding Your Skin, cepreaching.org/written-sermons.



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"Look for them elsewhere." Ralph looked straight ahead, but he spoke with conviction. "The inn is full."

"Kind sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are very weary."

"There is no room for you."

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child and must find a place to rest for the night. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Ralph looked down at Mary. There was a long pause. The audience became tense with embarrassment.

"No, begone!", I coached.

Ralph just stood there.

Three times I prompted him from the wings, each time louder than the last. The angels backstage with me were becoming anxious, too. At last, Ralph automatically repeated the words he had learned in those long weeks of practice:

"No, begone!"

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary and started to turn away. The innkeeper Ralph did not return to his inn as directed. He stood there watching the forlorn couple, looking perplexed, with his mouth open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filled with tears. Then suddenly, this Christmas pageant became different from all the rest.

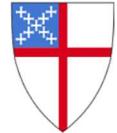
"Don't go, Joseph. Please don't go," Ralph called out. "Bring Mary back." His face brightened with a big smile. He stretched out his arms. "You can have my room!"⁵

⁵ Trouble At the Inn, by Dina Donohue. From Guideposts magazine, copyright 1966 by Guideposts, Carmel, New York. Included in Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul, pp. 16-18, copyright 1996 by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Aubery and Nancy Mitchell. Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL. Also included in Christmas In My Heart, pp. 47-51, copyright 1996 by Joe Wheeler, Doubleday, New York.



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This Advent let us make room for the Christ Child who has come down to be with us, in the holes we have fallen into. Let us repent and rejoice that this Jesus was born to save us from ourselves. Let us look at this baby lying in a manger and believe that He has come not to judge us but to save us!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.