May these readings prepare your hearts for the blessed Christmas season and your celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, the Savior of the world.
This year Advent begins on Sunday, November 28th. But why Advent? And why an Advent devotional? The answer lies in the wisdom of the ages. Ancient Israelites established a yearly calendar in response to God’s instructions for special feast days. Lectionaries were developed—selected Scriptures to be read week by week and for special feast days. The Church gradually established lectionaries containing readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles and Gospels.

From the 6th century, Western Christians have been observing Advent as a four-week preparation for Christmas, celebrating our Lord’s Incarnation. Advent meditations begin with reflections on Christ’s second coming. Jesus asks us to prepare for that coming (Mark 13:32-37). And the aged Apostle John said:

“When he is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2b-3).

As Advent continues, our devotions focus on Christ’s first coming and, with saints like Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56), we prepare a place for the Christ Child in ourselves—that we like saints of old may be Christ-bearers. May God enable us today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to contemplate the way in which Christians of all ages have received grace and power to contemplate and follow God’s rich gift to us in his Son. May we, with them, experience a penitential and enriching Advent.

Dean Borgman
The Christian life is summed up in this short psalm. Praise, confession, conviction, comfort, exhortation—all of these sprout up from the soil of Psalm 146. The author begins in a posture of praise and worship, a worship that includes creating melodies and spiritual songs to the Lord. He then moves to the confession that God is, as our Christian creeds echo, “Maker of heaven and earth.”

But the heart of Psalm 146 is what flows out of this prayerful confession. “Do not trust human leaders,” he says, “for there is no deliverance from them.” The shock we receive from this harsh exhortation is matched only by the fact that it applies to all human authorities. The psalmist does not have in mind only pagan rulers, but his own kin as well. The limitations of human authority are a result of their being finite, human, frail—they offer hope for a brief moment and then crumble. Even those rulers who shroud themselves in an aura of godliness are unable to bring deliverance, for their “breath” (ruah) will soon stop and the powerful will return to the dust of the earth.

Our hopes, our prayers, our longings for the Lord to fix this broken and sinful world must rest in the “one who keeps faith forever.”
Psalm 5 is what scholars call a lament, with what they call wisdom elements intermixed. The poet approaches God in prayer with his “lament” (“consider my sighing,” “listen to my cry for help”) which includes the fact that he has “enemies” (vs. 8) who cannot “be trusted,” whose “heart is filled with destruction,” whose “throat is an open grave” and who “speak deceit” with their tongue (vs. 9). David wants God to deal with his enemies, but before he asks God to do so, he builds his case before God.

He begins by establishing certain facts about God. First, God is the poet’s king and his God. If he were not David’s king and God, David could not presume to hope for his aid. Second, God is approachable. If he were not approachable, there would be no point to the prayer, “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice.” Third, God is righteous—he takes no pleasure in evil; the wicked cannot dwell with him, he hates liars and destroys them; he abhors the bloodthirsty (vs. 4-6). By contrast, David can hope for God’s help and favorable judgment: God has, by his mercy, enabled David to worship the Lord in his “house” (i.e., temple), and ask that the Lord will guide him in righteousness (vs. 7-8).

Once these facts are established—once the suppliant has built his case against his foes and for himself—he can call upon God to act according to his nature, which has been established in the preceding verses. David calls upon God, then, to “declare them guilty [and] banish them for their many sins.” He can ask God to do so because he has established that God is righteous and abhors, and judges, evil. He can also ask God to “spread [his] protection” over those who take refuge in him and love his name (name meaning, in the OT and ancient Near East, the essential nature, or character—hence, those who “love [God’s] name” love God for who he really is).

David can conclude with an avowal of confidence in God, who, being righteous, blesses the righteous and protects them (“You surround them with your favor as with a shield,” vs. 12). David began with a lament, but the wisdom that affirms God’s nature has enabled him to make a confident plea.
For centuries the people of Israel awaited the arrival of their Messiah with joyful expectation. Yet when he finally came, it was to a world filled with hostility. Many received him, but many others did not. Paul reminds the Thessalonians the persecution they are suffering is not unlike that experienced by Jesus himself. Everywhere the gospel goes there are those who oppose it. But Paul’s purpose is to encourage, by pointing out that the power of God prevails. It prevails in the transformed and redeemed lives of those who receive his word. Unlike their persecutors, they are not motivated by jealousy and sin. They are no longer under the wrath of God. They have been brought into the fellowship of love which causes Paul to rejoice and eagerly desire to see them face-to-face.

We too live in an age that is growing increasingly hostile to the gospel. Around the world Christians suffer grave persecution. Even in America there is growing intolerance of those who adhere to the truths of Scripture. But the power of God manifested in his Word remains as powerful today as in the days of the apostles. It changes our lives, and it has the power to transform those with whom we share it. And this gives us cause for rejoicing just as Paul rejoiced in the Thessalonians. As we see lives changed and prayers answered, we have confidence in the final triumph of the Lord. Let us share the good news with boldness!

As we wait for the second Advent, Scripture tells us Satan prowls like a lion, or in the context of this passage, he is a “road cutter.” That term comes from 1 Thessalonians 2:18: “Satan hindered us.” The term “hinder” was originally a military term meaning to “chop” or “cut.” In the ancient world, retreating armies would chop up the road behind them to hinder the advancing army. That’s what Satan does. He hinders the advancement of the gospel by destroying the testimony of the messengers, by causing disunity and by persecuting the witnesses; and that can turn us into “puppies.” The word for “unsettled” in 3:3 was used to describe the wriggling and shaking of puppies. No wonder the apostle thanks God that his dear people in Thessalonica were standing firm (vs. 8), and no wonder he prays that God would strengthen their hearts (vs. 13). As Satan tries to delay, hinder and stop the spread of the gospel, may you be strengthened, and may you be blameless and holy in the presence of God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again (vs. 13).
“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (vs. 11-12).

In this season of Advent, we anticipate commemorating the birth of Jesus, the infinite, Almighty God becoming a small, helpless baby. When we think of Jesus, we often focus on his divinity, and on his divine mission of redemption which restores our peace with God. But this season reminds us that the God-man came into the world in the ordinary way, and grew in wisdom and stature in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52) in the ordinary way. He reminds us that living an ordinary life to the glory of God is a worthy ambition.

Our society worships celebrity. Our society worships material success. A poll of young people found that over 40% would rather be a personal assistant to a celebrity than the CEO of a major corporation, the president of Yale or Harvard or a U.S. senator. Sometimes we Christians can also get caught up in this focus on celebrity and material success. But Paul says here that living an ordinary life to the glory of God and doing our work with integrity is pleasing to God. The God-man himself spent most of his life living an ordinary life to the glory of God, starting with his birth.
short in our mission. Today God wants to encourage us
with the hope of his final plans and the power of his present
protective cover.

We pray for one another in the words of Psalm 20:

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble,
the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
grant you your heart’s desire and prosper all
your plans.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise
him in the heights above.

Psalm 148 describes God’s inherent nature as
deserving of worship and his sovereignty over all.
Therefore, it is right and fitting that everything in
and of the earth should give glory to God—both material
and immaterial aspects of creation—the sun, moon, angels,
mountains and kings. During this chilly winter month, it is
an especially reassuring reminder that all of creation, even
the snow and stormy winds (vs. 8) are subject to his bidding.
Indeed, everyone should “praise the name of the Lord” (vs. 5).

How does this psalm declaring the power and sovereignty of
God inform our understanding of Advent?

One of the great mysteries of our faith is the seemingly
dialectical nature of our Lord—his sovereignty and his
immanence. Cognitively, this complex duality offers a
lifetime of rich exploration. Emotionally, the powerful God
of the universe having “pitched his tent among us” supplies
comfort and hope. He is simultaneously governing the entire
universe and yet is as close, as human and as personal as a
newborn baby. Today, during Advent, may God grant us a
special awareness of his most intimate presence.
Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry into the evening as wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands” (vs. 11-12).

There are three pithy sayings I have heard that would seem to summarize what Isaiah is communicating to Israel and by implication to us, in this passage pregnant with meaning.

Saying one: “YOUR PERSPECTIVE DETERMINES YOUR PRIORITIES AND YOUR PRIORITIES DETERMINE YOUR PRACTICE.”

Israel lost perspective. They were to be God’s covenant people demonstrating to the nations around them what it meant to be God’s people. God had put them in the land and blessed them so that they might enhance God’s reputation. Yet, instead of showing generosity to those around them, like God, they became greedy; instead of pursuing justice like God, they pursued their own joy and instead of showing compassion like God, they dispensed condemnation. Isaiah is saying you have forgotten your purpose—you are not here to make a name—but here to glorify a name.

Saying Two: “GOD MAY NOT PAY AT THE END OF EVERY MONTH—BUT GOD PAYS.”

Isaiah shows us in this passage that God is serious about his reputation and his covenant. Israel broke covenant with God. God was clear that they were to keep covenant with one another and if they did not, there would be judgment. The word “woe” is a term not only of judgment, but of a lament at a funeral. The Israelites who broke covenant would not enjoy their acquisitions (vs. 10-11) because they themselves would be acquired in judgment by the Assyrians (vs. 26).

SAYING THREE: “GOD’S FAVORITE DEPARTMENT IS LOST AND FOUND.”

Advent reminds us that God being God does not end with judgment but seeks reconciliation. The heart of God is to bring us back to himself so that we might “regain our perspective” and fulfill all that he has designed us to be. May this season remind you to thank God for the one who made us his priority, took on the judgment we were to face and whose joy was to reconcile us with the Father.
The Importance of Leaves

When fruit trees grow leaves in the spring, one anticipates the final product—fruit. Jesus uses the simple fig tree to sketch out for his listeners his second coming and the coming of his Kingdom. The leaves of the tree signify the promise of things to come, and Jesus can be counted on to fulfill his promises, just like the much-expected fruit. He will come. He will return again as the magnificent, glorious Son of Man.

But we can be distracted from eagerly watching—living—for him. Our focus easily shifts. We may become discouraged as we wait for him. We may even want to give up. But in spite of the temptations we face: excess or distress, as noted in this text, we know that Christ is coming again to rule in power and might. He warns his ancient and present-day disciples, “Pray that you may be able to... stand before the Son of Man.”

Sometimes we don’t connect the importance of the fruit tree’s leaves with the promise of autumn bounty. But that’s exactly what Jesus wants us to do, to see in the common leaf the assurance of his coming and kingly rule.

The promise of leaves is the promise of Jesus’ second coming.
The roads from Jerusalem were well-journeyed, so news was everyone's constant traveling companion. One Passover the news was cataclysmic, as two believers updated a passing stranger about the recent execution of the powerful healer, Jesus. Imagine their surprise when the stranger responded by showing them that Jesus’ persecution was prophesied everywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.

One place he might have taken them was to Psalm 37, where David’s victimization so paralleled the recent suppression of Jesus. Pursued by the chief ruler, the beleaguered David warned his followers not to dread or envy the power of their adversaries, but to trust and delight in the power of God’s justice, knowing it will ultimately triumph (vs. 1-4). Therefore, David counseled, be patient and don’t let anger turn you into a replica of your oppressor (vs. 5-8), because God is working to destroy their power and give the righteous everlasting victory (vs. 10-18).

The hope the travelers to Emmaus were seeking (Luke 24:21) was alive in the one walking with them. How often in persecution, disaster, catastrophe, disappointment do we worry, despair or even envy those who are powerful enough to make us miserable? These are the moments we need to realize that Jesus is walking beside us and bringing us a hope which passes all understanding.

The lesson David teaches in Psalm 37 and Jesus explained to the travelers is that many of life’s journeys are filled with difficulty and suffering. But the God who has called us is more powerful than any opposition that we face, whether temporary or terminal, and God’s hope is eternal.
Few leaders in human history have rivaled Judah’s king Ahaz for his unrelieved wickedness. He abandoned the ways of his forefather David. He offered at least one of his sons in child sacrifice. He plundered the Lord’s temple, stealing whatever seemed valuable, recklessly profaning its sacred contents. Ahaz was a hardcore idolatry addict, erecting altars and sponsoring worship to false gods from neighboring pagan nations. His folly and unfaithfulness left Judah vulnerable and cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Challenged by the prophet Isaiah to seek a sign from the Lord, Ahaz refused.

And yet, just at that low point, God delivered a sign of redemption to come: a young woman, a virgin, would conceive and bear a son who would be named Immanuel, “God with us.” In the darkest, worst hour, God brought hope and the promise of his presence.

In hindsight, it must have occurred to many that this prophecy was fulfilled (in part, at least) when Ahaz’s own son, Hezekiah, succeeded him as king. Bad dad, great son: what a miracle! Hezekiah quickly cleaned out all the idols and restored the worship of the true God of Israel.

And of course, it is Matthew who records the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:22-23). This is gospel indeed: our leaders may be dreadful and we the people aren’t much, if any, better—and yet God promises to come and be with us. Praise to Immanuel.
A Time of Judgment

Advent is the season of reflection, a time to ponder God's work in the world. It is a time to prepare for his deeds of judgment and redemption.

Isaiah is keen to warn Israel of impending doom. The king of Assyria is coming like the rush of mighty waters, carrying everything in its path. There is no turning back the floods that have overflowed their channels. The only word that can be spoken is:

Strap on your armor and be shattered;
Strap on your armor and be shattered. (vs. 9)

Destruction two times over is hardly a word that is easy to hear. No doubt we would rather contemplate the birth of the Christ Child. But there is a word before that last word to which we must listen, for what we fear is as important as what we embrace.

This Bible passage is quite clear in saying that God alone is worthy of our fear. The prophet serves up this word in a powerful way for this Advent season:

But the Lord of Hosts,
him you shall regard as holy.
Let him be your fear,
let him be your dread. (vs. 13)

Living in the cleansing fear of God is an act of faith. It is enough for us in this moment to hear this strong word. Letting the Lord be our fear and our dread will make room for the song of the angels.
he prophets declared, “Thus saith the LORD.” But though the word was spoken through them, they were the first to humble themselves and tremble before it (Jeremiah 23:9). To Israel belong the oracles of God—but that made God’s people servants of the word, not its masters. Mary gave birth to Christ, but she did not become lord over the one she had birthed. Instead, her confession remained, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38) and “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). John’s ministry preceded that of Jesus, but he pointed away from himself, willfully decreasing even as Jesus’ influence increased. He unequivocally declared, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Tucked away in the Great Commandment (Mark 12:31) is a clue for Christians to let Christ increase in us. It reads, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus, here, assumes our self-love. Yet, he is our Lord and we are his subjects. We are called to love ourselves properly as God has loved us. This way, we let Christ increase in and through us as we extend that love to our neighbors in this Advent season.

Who is this Jesus of whom we sing? “Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free...Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King...”

The youthful, impetuous Peter exclaimed that he was “the Messiah, the son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Years later, an aged, more mature Peter affirms in unmistakable terms that he is “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1–2).

Using an elegant Greek grammatical construction in these verses, Peter makes it clear that Jesus is not only the Christ—that royal Messianic descendant of David destined to rescue and rule the people of God; nor only the Savior, who like Moses would deliver people from the ultimate enslavement of sin and death; but also—indeed consummately—God himself. What is more, this God of glory and absolute virtue (vs. 3) has invited us to know him and to participate in his glory and virtue.

As Peter goes on to say (vs. 5–7), our response begins with faith, but matures ultimately into love. In this Advent season, as so many around us are consumed with shopping, wrapping, decorating and baking, let us rather work hard to appropriate the goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and kindness that move us from faith to love. That will be our best preparation for Christmas.
The true light … was coming into the world” (John 1:9). That is how evangelist John (1:9) reflects about the Christmas event while summarizing the Incarnation by “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). He must have read Isaiah who, many hundreds of years in advance, sees the coming of a “great light” (vs. 2) and of a “child born… son given” (vs. 6).

Isaiah was a royal advisor and a prophet who knew how to think politically. Today we would say that he was not only deeply spiritual, but also contextually relevant. He spreads out his prophetic message like painting a big picture on a large canvas of history, present and future. He actually saw more than he could fully grasp, for his own boundaries of understanding were transcended by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Apart from the divine light, people live in “distress and darkness” (8:22 and 9:2), but the great prophetic insight is that God is willing and capable of changing our human circumstances and transforming the situation by replacing the “shadow of death” with the “dawning of light” (vs. 2). The coming of light brings with it much joy and abundance (vs. 3). Light, joy and abundance speak of freedom from oppression. The ultimate deliverance comes with the birth of a saving ruler, the Son of God. Royal titles ascribed to this “light and child/son” clearly point to his deity (now read verse 6 aloud!). He is the source of all wisdom and power, fatherly love and is the ultimate peacemaker. The final result of his deliverance and rule is harmony of peace and justice. Just what our world needs!
Most of us are too busy to slow down. Kind of odd, huh? Our lives move at such a pace that we can barely remember what’s actually important any longer. If our lives are a story, the story seems to have too much filler and too little real plot. It probably wouldn’t make a good novel, would it? By contrast, the story of Jesus moves with the feel of an epic drama. It is almost too grand to keep fully in view. Here in Mark 1, we learn that the epic drama of Jesus doesn’t begin with his birth. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, tells us that the story of Jesus goes back even to Isaiah, and representatively in Isaiah to the whole of the Old Testament. And what John the Baptist tells us about that story here in the first chapter of Mark, as the whole of the Old Testament tells us, is that the Messiah will give us the breath of life itself. Jesus’ mark on the ages will be the gift of life, which is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a story too good to be too busy to miss. May your life slow down long enough to savor the Savior’s story.
John the Baptist challenged his hearers to the most essential aspect of preparation for the coming of the Christ: that of repentance. The Christmas story begins with an announcement of the birth of this forerunner of the Messiah, the one who was to make ready the path before him.

When Jesus of Nazareth had come to him for baptism, he had identified him as the Christ; but since that time, Jesus had established no political system, raised no army, shown no interest in cultivating the rich and powerful. Within the dungeon, John began to wonder and sent his disciples to inquire whether the identification had indeed been correct. Implicit in his question is also John’s uncertainty about his own identity. If he had failed to identify the true Messiah, was he himself an authentic prophet?

Jesus answered the inquirers by a concrete demonstration of precisely those works which the Scriptures had promised would accompany the coming of the Christ. The blind saw; the lame walked; the marginalized rejoiced in the good news of God’s love. After the disciples’ departure, Jesus took on the more delicate task of vindicating John’s own identity. He had come “in the spirit and power” of the promised Elijah, as the last and greatest of God’s prophets.

During Advent, we ask again “who is Jesus”; and in his identity as Son of God and redeemer and Lord, we find ourselves. It is his coming that brings meaning to our lives and enables us to find our own true identity.
I’ve been rethinking how we handle Christmas music. It’s not so much carols in October; it’s what we hear on Christmas Eve. I think we should add a prelude from the scores of films like The Longest Day or Saving Private Ryan.

Why? Because the Incarnation is an invasion. The eternal Son of God becomes human to reclaim God’s creation from self-centered usurpers—like us!—and to restore God as its rightful ruler. Jesus’ birthday is God’s D-Day.

Before any invasion, special operations forces are sent in to prepare the way, to try to get the local population to welcome the invaders. A friend of mine, a Navy SEAL, gave me a general idea of what’s involved. They live off the land, blend into the countryside, avoid population centers and seek out possible sympathizers ready for change.

Sort of sounds like John the Baptist: he hangs out in the wilderness, eats locusts and wild honey, wears camel camo and prepares people for the Incarnation invasion, the coming of Christ. Like a typical soldier, John gets right to the point: “Join the repentance rebellion! Switch your allegiance from self-serving to Christ-serving. Sprout fruits that reveal your roots” (vs. 8-9). These remain our Advent orders, as timely as we prepare for Christ’s second coming as they were for his first coming, as necessary for our neighbors as for John’s.
The motto of the Boy Scouts in my youth was, “Be Prepared.” As young boys, we were rarely prepared for the sudden changes that took place on a camping trip or a hike. However, with each mistake there came an opportunity for learning how to be prepared for the same event the next time.

The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Ephesus gives this final note of encouragement to them and to us, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

This is such a contemporary note for all of us who bear the name Christian. God has equipped us with all that we need to face the battles of an increasingly godless and secular society. There is no need to despair about how difficult things are since we have the recognition that our battle is essentially a spiritual one and that the full armor of God is more than adequate for the day-to-day battle that we face.

The Roman soldiers were well equipped with footwear that enabled them to stay upright and move forward in any terrain. So it is for us, that the Gospel upon which we stand and which we live out day after day empowers us to make peace in a chaotic world. This is not a passive activity but a demonstration of how the gospel is transformational. We are protected as we follow our Lord in trusting obedience one step at a time, since that is the dimension of faithfulness that becomes our shield.

In this glorious season of Advent, we celebrate that we are privileged ambassadors of the King of Kings. And we are prepared.
Some people don’t expect much from God. The writer of Psalm 61 expected a great deal from God: that God would hear, listen, lead, protect and answer his petitions. Even though this lament psalm was born out of adversity, it exudes hope and expectation.

This lament begins with a protest (“Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.” vs. 1). It continues with petitions: for protection (“I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.” vs. 4) and for long life for the king (“May he be enthroned in God’s presence forever.” vs. 7). It ends with a promise of praise (“Then will I ever sing praise to your name.” vs. 8). This promise is grounded in God’s past protection (“For you have been my refuge.” vs. 3) and God’s covenant faithfulness (“You have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.” vs. 5).

Advent is the season when we remember the first coming of Christ and expectantly prepare for the second advent of our victorious king. We anticipate his arrival because we long for deliverance from our laments. We look for the time when he will wipe every tear from our eyes, when God himself will dwell with us again, when he will be enthroned forever and ever. Our great expectations are grounded in his first coming when he so tenderly loved us, hopeless sinners. So we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Come ever so quickly.
In this classic text of the Christmas season, we are given an intimate glimpse of a key moment in salvation history. This is in many respects what we should expect from a story about an angelic announcement of a birth, as such stories frequently occur in the Old Testament before divinely appointed leaders are born. In this story however, the miracle is amplified by Mary’s simple question in verse 34, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” The angel’s answer provides the basis for one of the most profound and important mysteries of God’s revelation in Jesus. God will become a human being. And Mary is to give him a name that will sum up his mission and personhood with perfect clarity: Jesus, “The Lord Saves.” The magnitude of this great revelation to Mary is contrasted with Mary’s own station. She is but a young woman, still unmarried, from a small backwater part of a backwater province of the Roman Empire. And yet God has chosen the small things of the world to bring about a great salvation. Mary is herself quite cognizant of this contrast, and her response is a model to all of us, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said” (vs. 38). In this simple expression of faith, Mary models a proper response to God’s gift in Jesus. May we respond likewise this Advent season.
favor to this young Hebrew girl and through her, God sent his Son who would “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21), thus fulfilling his promise to Abraham, “just as he promised our ancestors.” To be sure, Mary was very much favored and blessed by God with a unique role in redemptive history. But to those of us living in this fallen world, she connects with us at a deeply emotional level. She reminds us that even while we are plagued with fear and confusion in this life, yet there is a joy that sustains us. The Magnificat points the way beyond fear and confusion to the joy of the magnificent faithfulness of God and his magnificent Son.

As one reads Zechariah’s response in Luke 1:67-80, it seems clear that he was most excited not about his own son but about the fact that his arrival was the harbinger of the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah himself. The angel’s message meant that God’s promised redemption was as good as done! God “has come and has redeemed his people” (vs. 68). Zechariah is acutely aware of how long Israel has been waiting for this news. It was news that had been promised through the prophets “long ago” (vs. 70). The promise hearkened all the way back to the covenant God made with Abraham (vs. 72-73). God was indeed going to make good on his promise to bring about the complete redemption of his people. The wait for the second coming has been longer than the time between Abraham and the first coming of the Messiah. But just as the news of John’s arrival assured Zechariah that the Messiah would soon be there, we rejoice in the knowledge that as God kept his promises to his people in the days of Zechariah and Elizabeth, he will keep his promises to us as well. God will indeed bring about the ultimate consummation of our redemption with the second coming of our Lord.