

Pearl Church

2009 Advent Readings



Advent at Pearl Church



The four Sundays prior to Christmas Day are a special time of anticipation and preparation for the coming incarnation of God among us. We remember the centuries of longing by God's people for the Messiah. We think about what it might have been like, living in a world that had yet to have God in flesh dwelling among us. We anticipate His second coming to reclaim us; this leads to a renewed awareness of our sin and a desire to "clean house" and remain faithfully watchful. His return is imminent.

This booklet, with readings selected from Scripture and historical sources, as well as contributions from members of our community, offers to prepare us for and guide us through this season.

We invite you to prayerfully consider these readings as the weeks progress and the coming of Christ approaches. May this be a holy and fruitful advent for all who walk through the season this year at Pearl Church. All the art has been created by our Children's Ministry.

Please consider joining us for Sunday services:
10AM and 11:30AM @ the EcoTrust (2nd Floor)

And for Christmas Eve:
5PM, Friday December 24th @ the EcoTrust (2nd Floor)

For more information, visit: www.pearlchurch.com

Longing

November 29: First Sunday of Advent

" . . . as Aliens and strangers in the world . . ."
- 1 Peter 2:11

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."
- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

In Advent, we are reminded of this very place: a realization that something is gravely wrong with the world that we live in, an insatiable longing to be home with our Father, completely understood, forgiven, and loved, and the knowledge that this other world, this reality has already invaded this world in Christ's coming.

Nothing quite drives home the point that you don't belong to the world you live in like a laminate government issued identification card that says "Resident Alien." Also known as the green card, this was the card that would identify me in this country when I moved here at age 13. Although I now have been a naturalized citizen in this country for more than a decade, the term resident alien continues to ring true.

The picture of me as a teenager in suburban Seattle is a comically awkward one. The painful aesthetics of the 80s notwithstanding, this was a picture of an immigrant, with complete inability even to consider what it would mean to fit in with the surroundings. I did eventually learn to fit in better, make friends and

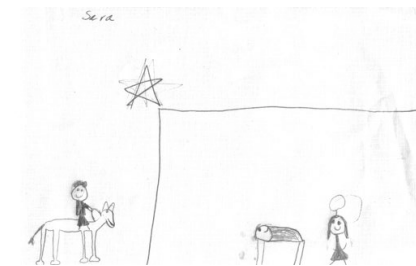
speaking the language. Yet no one needed to remind me that this is not where I was from—this was definitely my adopted home, where I resided as an alien.

At the same time, my facility with my native tongue began to fail. Its cultural nuances became less and less intuitive. Returning to Korea to my roots meant discrete and unavoidable reminders that I no longer fit in there either. I could no longer understand the cultural references on television, or political inferences in the newspapers. People's clothes on the street began to appear "foreign" to me. There I was--in between worlds, finding myself a stranger and alien everywhere I went.

I wonder if this is what following Jesus in this world is like. We have left this world's way of living and thinking for God's way. Yet the new way does not come natural to us, even as the old world grows increasingly foreign. We live longing to be home, but between worlds, knowing we have not arrived and believing we cannot go back.

I long to be home. I long to have desires that are no longer divided between worlds. I long to be able to love with a pure heart. I long to be understood fully and to understand fully. I long to have unshakable peace. I long to truly belong.

- Thomas Hwang



Anticipation

December 6: Second Sunday of Advent

“Comfort, O comfort my people”, says your God,
“Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
And call out to her, that her iniquity
has been removed,
That she has received of the LORD’S hand
Double for all her sins.”

A voice is of one calling out,
“Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
“Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;
“Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”
Isaiah 40: 1-5

Standing At My Door

*–a story of God’s child finding joy by walking in the light, and
being let back into community. By Ben Bevard.*

Walking down that dark set of stairs
It got a little scarier day by day.
Could not even see my way back,
Was weighed down with all I had to pack.

I ran into a wall
Knocked myself silly,
Couldn’t see worth anything
Or even think a bit clearly.

I reached for a door
It wouldn’t even budge.
I looked underneath it,
Saw a sliver of light.

I heard you whisper
Standing at my door.

You had the key to release me.
At first I didn’t trust you to open it.
You responded by slipping a key under that door.

I asked, “What on earth was that for?”
You told me the lock was only on my side of the door.
It took a few tries for it to click.
Then I saw those open arms standing at my door,
No longer is my heart weary and sore,
I am alone no more.
Overwhelmed with so much love and joy,
Almost shaken to my core.

Joy

December 13: Third Sunday of Advent

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2:10-14

"Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day!"
-Henry Van Dyke

May our hearts unfold this Advent season.

I am not a person overly prone to joy. My choleric, task-oriented, temperament finds that emotion somewhat elusive. As I reflected upon the topic, I began to recall moments where I experienced joy in its purest form.

The first, of course, was our wedding day. I did not feel joy immediately before or during the ceremony. The wedding album captures the tense look on my face as I held my wedding bouquet in a defensive posture. The photos, however, after we've been pronounced husband and wife are completely

different. As we strode up the aisle, we weren't just smiling, we were beaming. After a lengthy and circuitous courtship, our joy was finally complete.

A second example of pure joy was the day I completed my under-grad. For a variety of reasons, it took me 18 years to complete a 4-year degree. The diploma was hard won. It represented years of sacrifice and effort. As I walked across the dais to receive my diploma, I nearly floated with joy.

This past fall we spent 15 days in Zambia on a Lifewater sanitation project. The days were long; the work was hard; plans went awry; and the students could be challenging. In spite of this, there were frequently moments of pure bliss. Each morning, our Seeds of Hope partners held their morning devotions outside our classroom door. The team sang worship songs in Bimba. I did not understand the words. I didn't have to. I knew their songs were about struggle, sorrow, deliverance and joy. Inexplicably, tears would spring to my eyes. The purity of their worship caused my spirit to soar heavenward - JOY!

Frequently I've been surprised by joy. It often seems to follow a struggle. It comes unexpectedly after scaling a mountain or emerging from a dark valley. Joy comes in fulfillment of deep longing. It usually comes hand-in-hand with peace. It fills your heart to overflowing.

For thousands of years, the world ached for a savior. Many still do. Jesus came to earth as a baby. We can set aside our longing and struggle to embrace Him. Joy is waiting for each of us. That empty spot in the universe is now filled by a King—JOY

- Linda Bergquist

Incarnation

December 21: Fourth Sunday of Advent

When the appropriate time had come, God sent out
his Son, born of a woman...

Galatians 4

Jesus Christ...in very nature God...made in
human likeness...

Philippians 2

The Word became flesh and made his
dwelling among us.

John 1

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born
to you; he is Christ, the Lord!

Luke 2

Incarnation...

God becoming man. Word becoming flesh.

Such poetic notions.

But has the poetry of it all served to soften the reality?
For as long as I can remember the incarnation has
been central to my life and faith, but has some of the
significance been lost to me over time?

Maybe a few new words and images would help refresh
my Advent meditations.

How about these, which share a root with 'incarnation':
chili con carne, carne asada, carnage, carnivore.

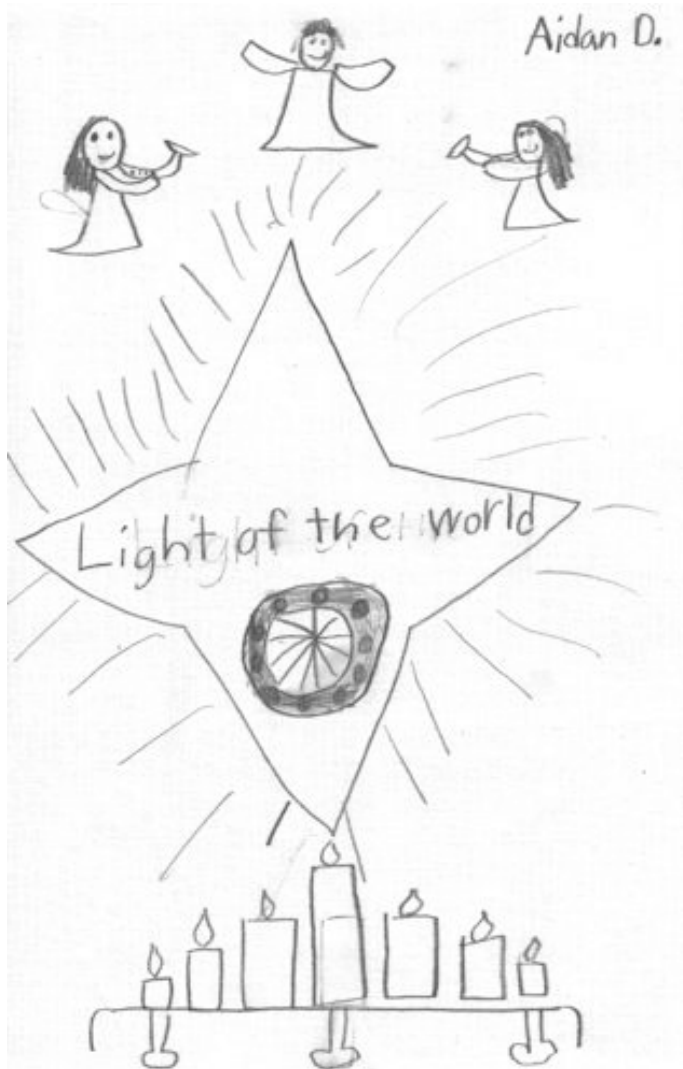
Meat. That's what their common root means.

Strange words to associate with baby Jesus, perhaps?
But I find they help me get at the gristly reality of the
incarnation a little better. They cause me to think less
poetically and a bit more plainly of the *fleshiness* of
'Word made flesh'.

So this Advent season I think I'll spend some time
dwelling on God con carne. God with meat.

Yes, a meaty, fleshy God. I like that better.

-Karl Coppock



Meeting at the EcoTrust Building, Sundays 10 and 11:30AM

www.pearlchurch.com