

# Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

DAILY READINGS FOR ADVENT

WHAT IS ADVENT?

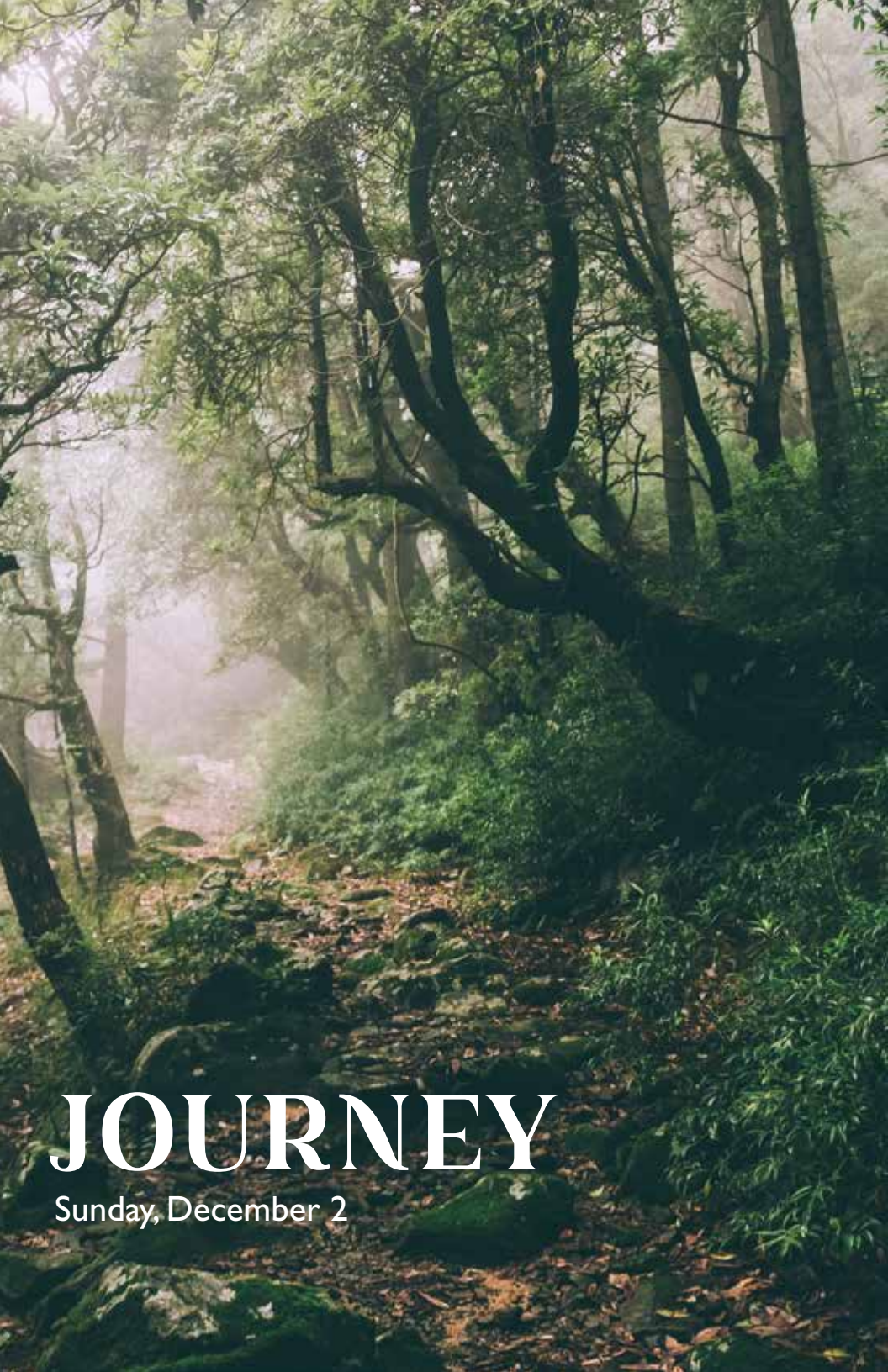
The word Advent means “coming.” It is a time to slow down, be quiet and meditate about the real meaning of Christmas. These four weeks before Christmas are a time to prepare our hearts and our lives as we wait for the coming of Jesus. We focus on the promise that God made to his people and how that promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Advent is also the beginning of the liturgical year. The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on the day before Christmas. It should be a time for new beginning for us as Christians.

One color stands out among all the others used at this holy season: Blue -- not the usual red or green. In antiquity, purple dye was very expensive, so purple came to signify wealth, power and royalty. Therefore, purple is the color for the season of Advent, which celebrates the coming of the King. Many churches use blue in Advent which signifies hopeful expectation and is traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary. Also, deep blue is the color of the clear, predawn sky, the color that covers the earth in the hours before the sun rises in the east. Most of us are not looking at the sky at that hour – perhaps we’re still asleep, or too drowsy to notice. Nonetheless, a deep, dark blue is the color that covers us in the dawning twilight.

Thus we use deep blue for Advent to shade the season with a hint of expectation and anticipation of the dawn of Christ. Surely penitence and spiritual discipline are part of the traditional Advent observance, and this is why so many of us are using Advent wreaths and devotionals to mark the days before Christmas.

Advent involves more than penitence, and by using deep blue we emphasize the church’s hope-filled and faithful watch for Christ. The deep blue of Advent inspires the hope of faith, it encourages us to keep watch for the promised light of Christ to break over the horizon, changing night into day, darkness into light, and filling our lives and our world with a holy and righteous splendor.

This booklet is designed to be your daily devotional, either privately or with others. Many members of Christ Church have contributed their thoughts on words we commonly hear during Advent. Each short essay is accompanied by a Scripture verse and a short prayer. Advent is not just a season, but a pathway that leads us to new beginnings. Your journey starts here. Rejoice and be glad in it!



# JOURNEY

Sunday, December 2

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”

Genesis 12:1-2

I can’t help but wonder what Abram’s thoughts were when he received this message from God. Was he joyful or confused? Did he pray for wisdom so he could avoid the pitfalls that awaited him? As we journey through life we tend to prepare for what is ahead of us. Planning makes us think we won’t wander around in circles and hopefully reach our destination smoothly. In reality, we come upon roadblocks and have to reroute along different paths that are more joyful or painful than those for which we planned. We experience indecision and bewilderment. We still want to be in charge of our journey rather than seek direction for our uneven path. Abram did as the LORD commanded and set out for the land of Canaan. He trusted God to guide him on his journey. I would like to believe that his trip was also filled with potholes so that he could be blessed and not miss God’s guidance along the way. Can we do the same? Will we put our trust in God and let him lead us on our journey with hope and thankfulness? If we can, we also will be blessed.

*Michelle Weller*

## **Prayer**

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord.Amen.

Prayer for Guidance

Pg. 832 Book of Common Prayer





# WATCH

Monday, December 3

The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives.

Proverbs 16:17

Watch is a word that implies some type of action. Watch your step, watch what you say. I believe God intends for us to care for ourselves and our fellow man. Being from the old school, I believe your word is your bond. I was taught that your actions define you as the type of person you are in life. What you say is like a double-edge sword—it can cut both ways. A compliment promotes warm feelings, while a sarcastic remark can cause pain. A simple hello to a stranger could make that person feel welcomed. Watch for that stranger.

*Ruben Torres*

## **Prayer**

O God, the source of eternal light: Shed forth your unending day upon us who watch for you, that our lips may praise you, our lives may bless you, and our worship on the morrow give you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for Saturdays

Pg. 123 Book of Common Prayer



# FOCUS

Tuesday, December 4



Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

In my family, I think I have always been known as the “worrier.” If I don’t have something halfway legitimate to worry about, I usually make up something. In my current, fourth-quarter stage of life, I am prone to worry about finances (did we save enough to make it through retirement), health issues (could a current symptom be a sign of a life-ending disease), and adult children (will their lives remain secure, healthy, happy). In addition to these somewhat private preoccupations, it is not unusual for me to spend time in deep concern over the divisive issues facing our country and the future of our democracy.

I believe my challenge is to focus on those moments of grace, both big and small, which have come to me at various times throughout my life. I must try to remain grounded in the belief that God, a power far greater than myself, is in control. Perhaps, I should contemplate how I might become a very small part of that which is good in the eyes of God.

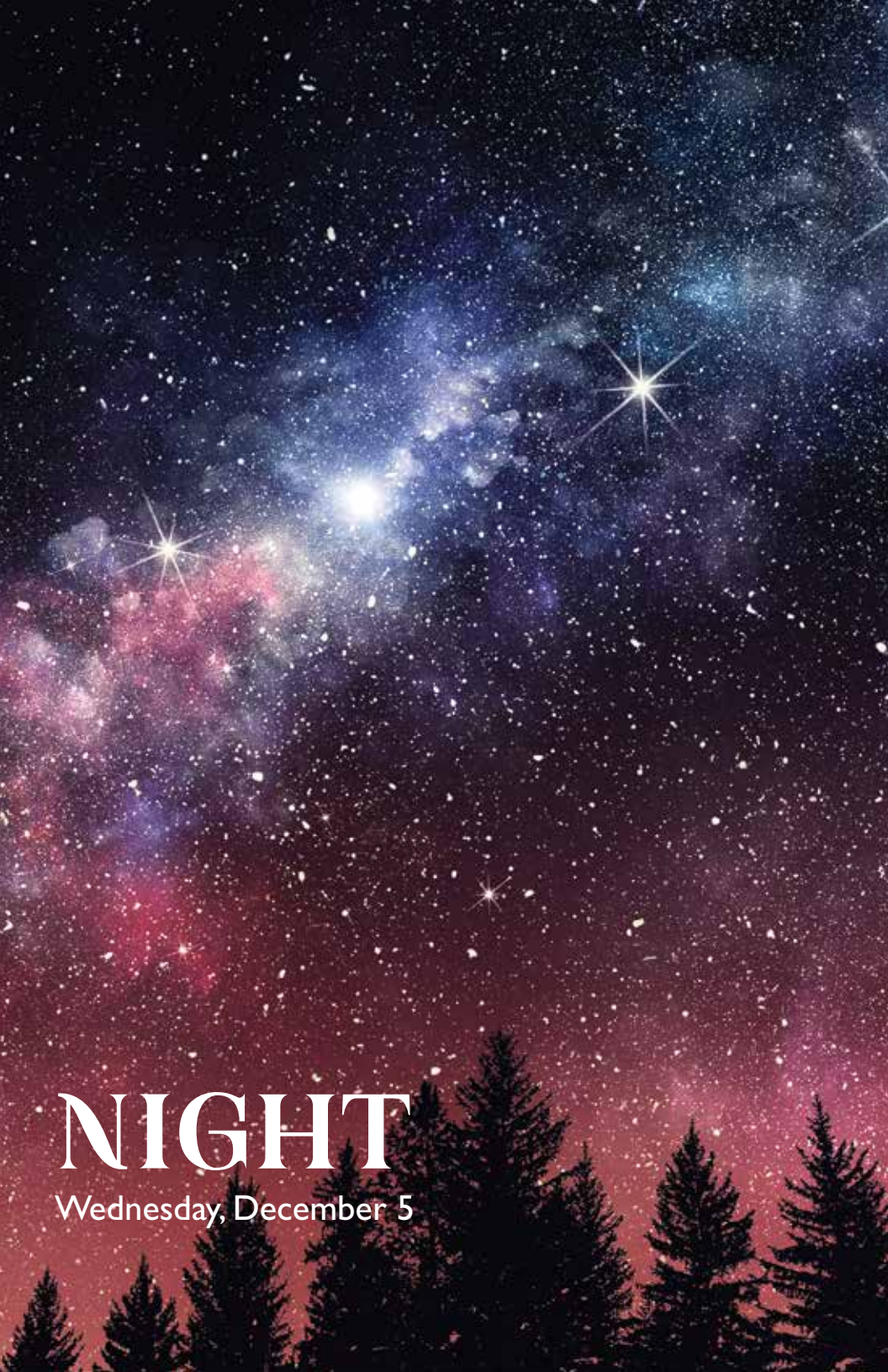
*Diane Torres*

## **Prayer**

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to focus and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for Proper 14

Pg. 232 Book of Common Prayer



# NIGHT

Wednesday, December 5

In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals,

Job 33:15

Night. God speaks to us in the night. The period between the darkness after sunset and the morning light is a metaphor in the Bible for a time of danger and weeping or a time for visions that communicate divine things. I often wake up in the middle of the night worried about things that I was not aware of during the day. The time between my first sleep and my second sleep has become a time when I can feel close to God. I lie in bed taking deep breaths, imagining the air in the room as an ocean of Goodness. I breathe in, thinking of something I desire and breathe out naming something I want to be free of. This is a way to welcome God at night.

*Jane Wells*

## **Prayer**

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen

Prayer from the service of Compline

Pg. 134 Book of Common Prayer





# LIGHT

Thursday, December 6

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

A stained-glass artist begins a work of art with a beautiful design and a plan. The artist uses sheets of glass of various colors, textures, and transparency. It is not until the glass is scored, broken and assembled with other broken pieces that the artist's vision for the piece begins to materialize. The beauty of the piece is not realized until light shines through illuminating and revealing the beauty of each piece and the work as a whole.

God has a beautiful design and plan for each one of us. He takes the pieces that make up our lives, breaks them in the right places and creates His masterpiece. We may look at the broken pieces and see a mess and feel the pains of being broken. God looks at them and sees His beautiful creation.

If we allow God's light to shine through us, we let others see God's light and see our lives as He sees us: His masterpiece.

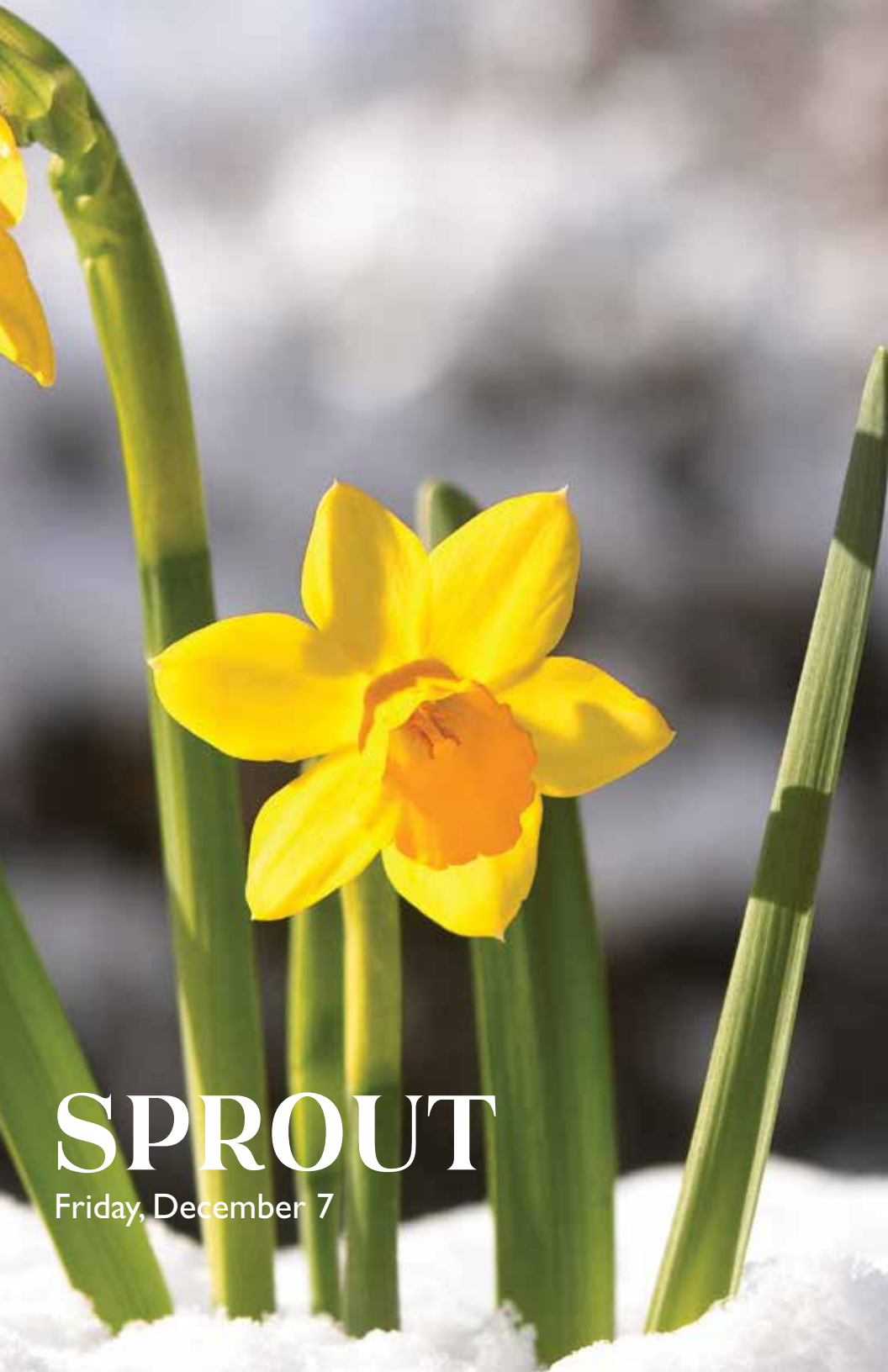
*Sally & David Louth*

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the First Sunday in Advent

Pg. 211 Book of Common Prayer



# SPROUT

Friday, December 7

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:11

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Spring is my favorite time of year because of the intense colors that show up. The “spring green” seems to be more intense in grass and leaf, and blooms emerge in a myriad of colors that are equally bright and deep. Growing up in the Panhandle of Texas, I experienced spring colors that were bright, but not nearly as varied as they are here in Central Texas. The spring colors, especially in the wildflowers are one of the reasons I love living in Central Texas.

The leaves and grass that emerge, along with the colors, are great evidence of simplicity and complexity that are wrapped up in the seeds. Seeds contain compounds that keep them from sprouting until conditions are just right. Stored up with the compounds are enzymes that make nutrients necessary for the energy the baby plant needs, providing the energy to grow. The “sprout” has all the nutrients necessary for life, and in measures that are exorbitantly more than in the plant as it matures. When the soil is rich and moisture readily available, the earth comes alive with what is needed to feed and to simply brighten our lives.

All is dependent on a moment that cannot be easily defined, on a process that can be observed but not easily replicated. Life springs in the world around us, and in us “from the Lord, the Giver of Life”. Our world is Changed. We are Changed. And we sing!

*Deacon Becky Sparks*

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you for making the earth fruitful, so that it might produce what is needed for life: Bless those who work in the fields; give us seasonable weather; and grant that we may all share the fruits of the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Agriculture

Pg. 824 Book of Common Prayer





# ALERT

Saturday, December 8

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

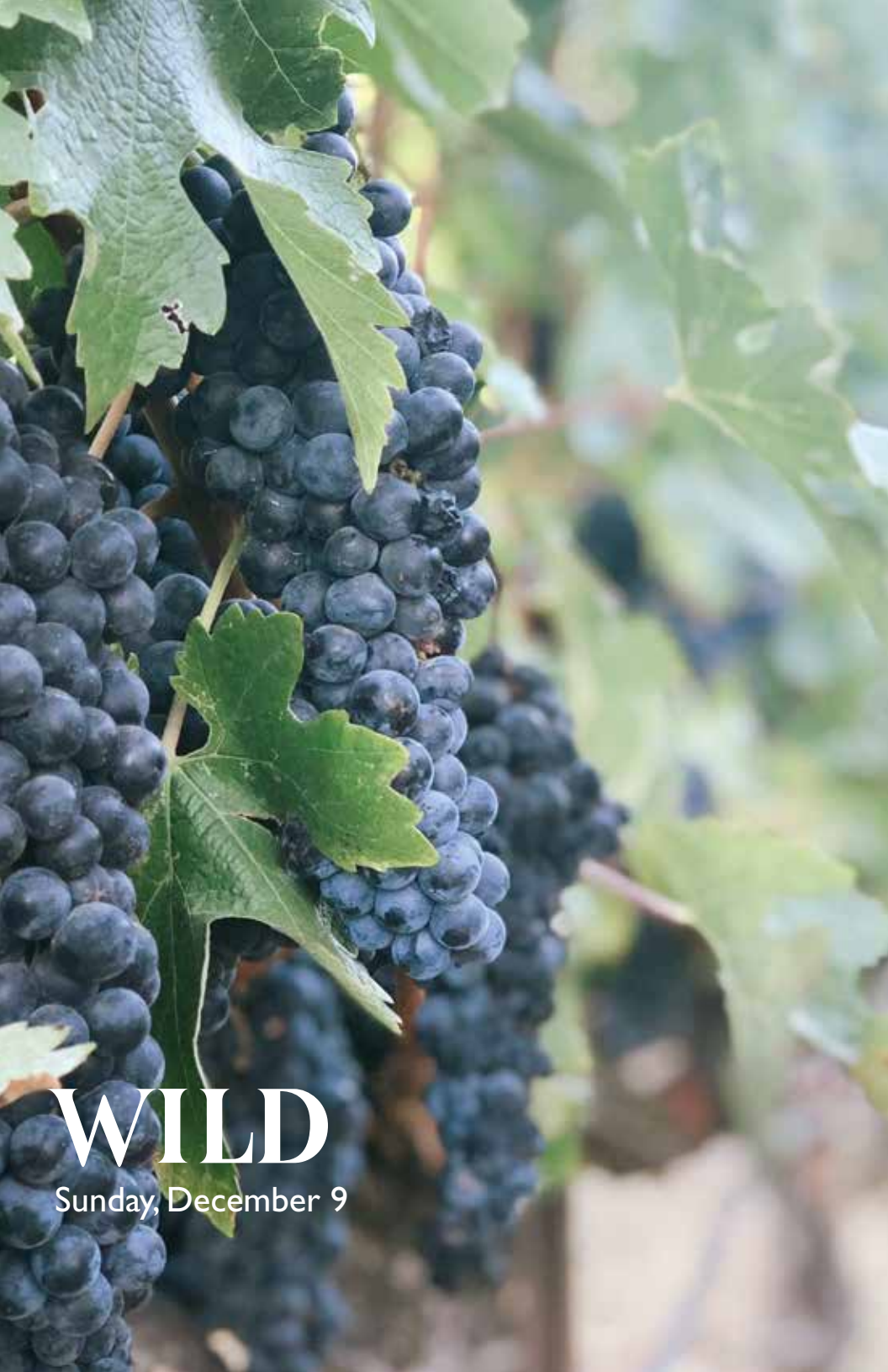
Matthew 24:44

Devotional  
*Ami Hooper*

## **Prayer**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may be alert to greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent  
Pg. 211 Book of Common Prayer



# WILD

Sunday, December 9

He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

Isaiah 5:2

Isaiah 5:2 sums up the story of a vineyard owner and his efforts to grow good grapes. The vineyard owner makes great preparation, carefully digging and preparing the soil, removing stones, and building proper devices for protection and preparation of the grapes. He plants with only the best vines. And all his efforts are rewarded with a harvest of wild grapes.

Why would the well-prepared vineyard produce “wild” grapes? In the context of the story, “wild” seems to mean “unexpected” and “undesirable.” We often make our best preparations to ensure predictable, quality outcomes in our lives. Instead, wild things happen and we get unexpected and undesirable results. Preparation and expectation are not enough – we must be willing to accept that there are factors we can’t foresee that may produce wild outcomes. We must be resilient enough and have faith enough to go back to the drawing board and let God work through us.

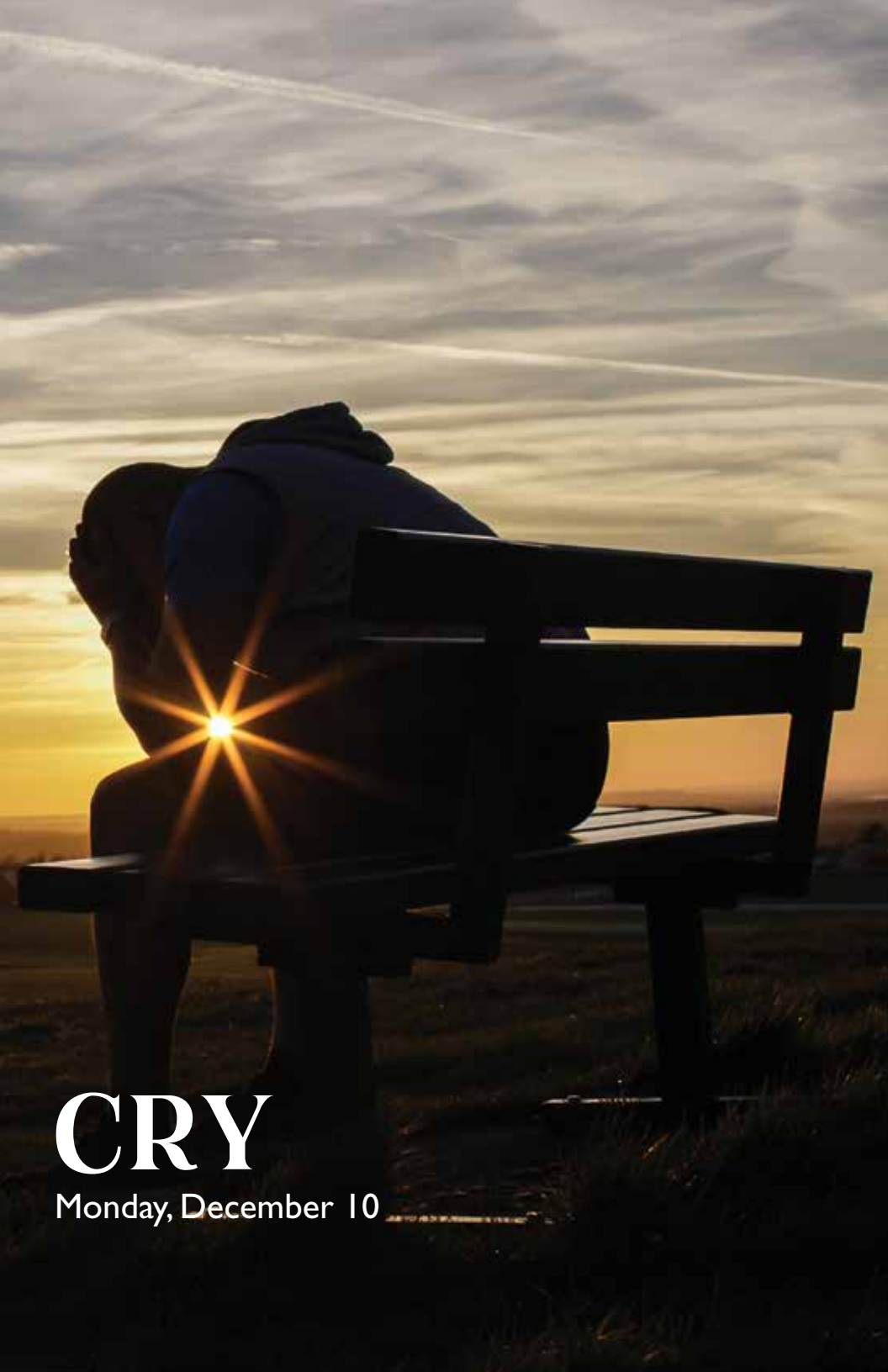
*Robert Atmar*

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for the wild choices we make, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for Proper 15  
Pg. 232 Book of Common Prayer



# CRY

Monday, December 10

Jesus began to weep.

John 11:35

This verse is a part of the story of Jesus' dear friend Lazarus who was seriously ill. Jesus was away and he chose to remain there for two more days, even with the knowledge of his friend being ill. Jesus told his disciples it was time to go because Lazarus' death was for their benefit. It was an opportunity to learn to trust in him.

The significance of this short phrase has been attributed to the fact that Jesus had human responses. He wept, sweated, bled, ate and drank. Christ was not an illusion or spirit. He was like us.

In my own life, like yours, I have cried many tears. Sadness, happiness, pain empathy and the realization of God's presence. I have found it embarrassing that I've cried at times. Someone once told me I had a "gift" of tears. At first, this sounded strange.

To know our Lord cried out of empathy, even when he knew what he was getting ready to do, touches me. "In his humanity, Jesus wept for Lazarus. In his divinity He raised him from the dead." - Pope Leo I

Come Lord Jesus!

*Harriett Brode*

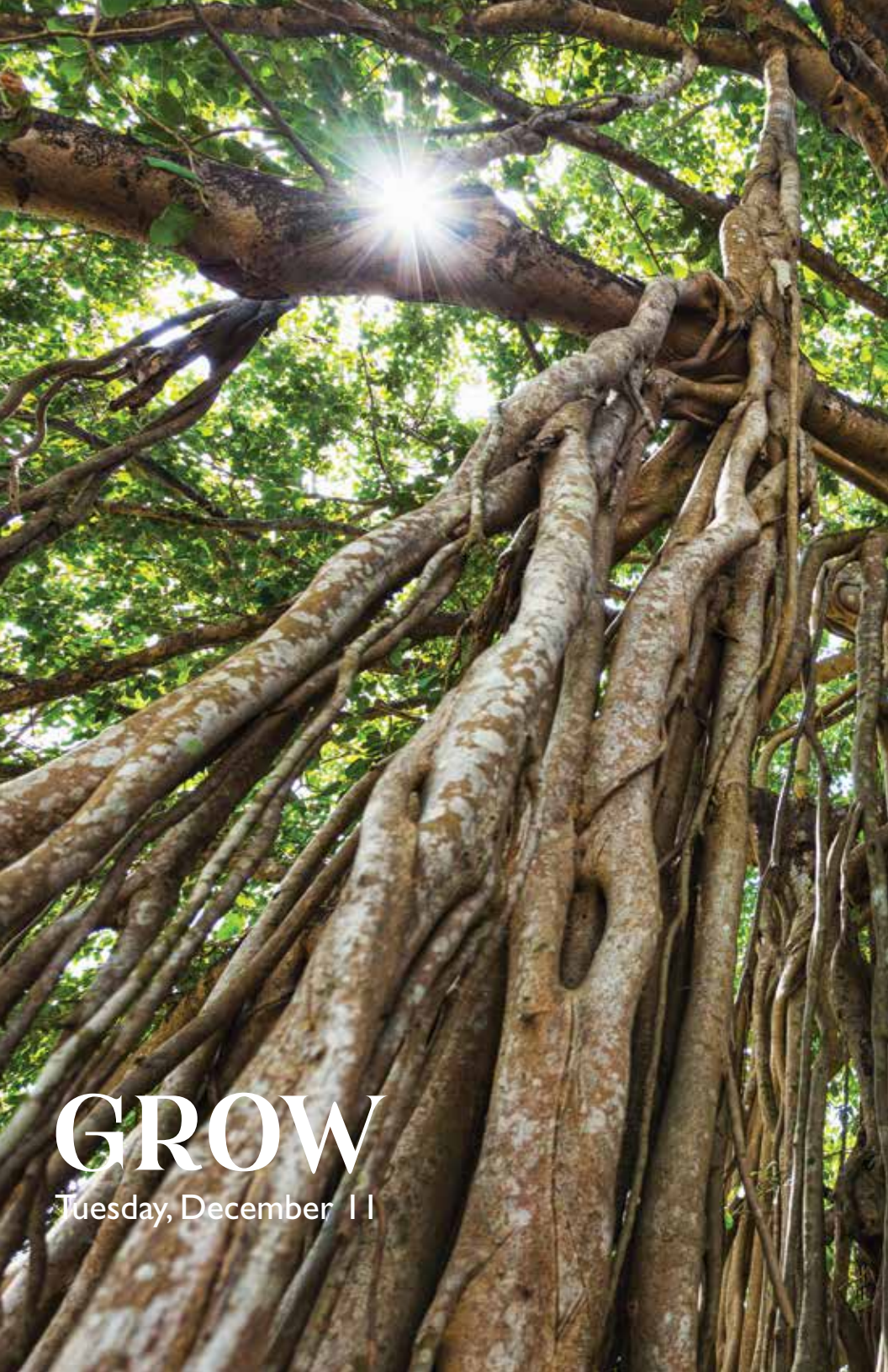
## **Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you that in your great love you have fed us with the spiritual food and drink of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ, and have given us a foretaste of your heavenly banquet. Grant that this Sacrament may be to us a comfort in affliction, and a pledge of our inheritance in that kingdom where there is no death, neither sorrow nor crying, but the fullness of joy with all your saints; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer Burial Liturgy

Pg. 498 Book of Common Prayer





GROW

Tuesday, December 11



So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7

These verses advise us to grow in Christ, not rest, especially in thankfulness. When we continue to expand ourselves — growing out and deep in Christ — there are so many things to be thankful for. Everything may not go our way all the time, but we know we are being given new ways to grow through our journey.

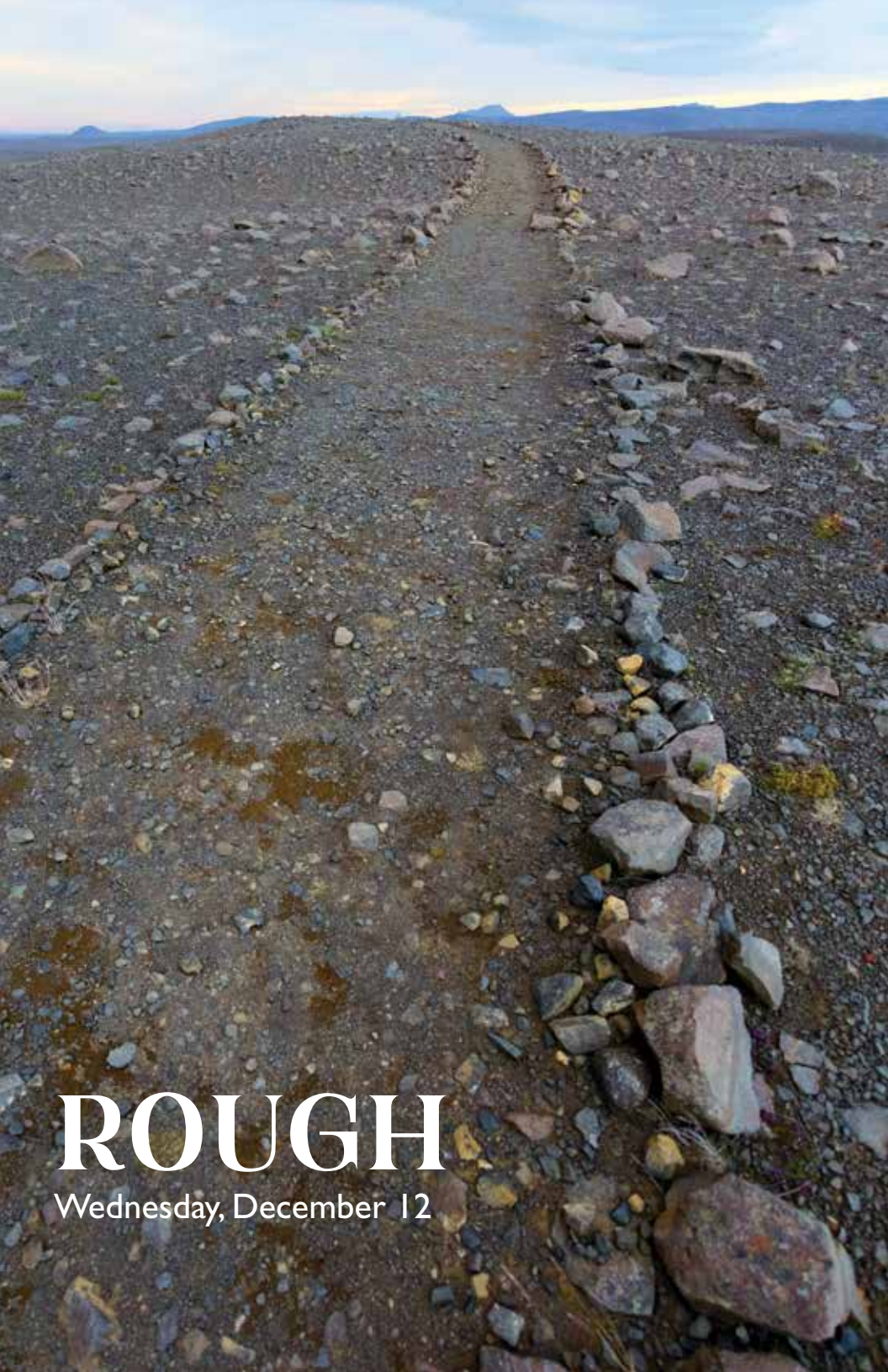
*Sandra Atmar*

## **Prayer**

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer Burial Liturgy

Pg. 498 Book of Common Prayer



# ROUGH

Wednesday, December 12

“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways (6) and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”

Luke 3:5

Jergens Lotion. Mom used it all the time. Used it so that her hands and skin wouldn't be “rough.” My earliest recollections of the word “rough” negative connotations: roughing it, he's rough, the weather is rough. Travel Messiah's parents was rough, his birth site was rough, the escape to Egypt was rough. Even Messiah's call to us is rough: take up your cross, deny yourself, follow me. Why would anyone want to do that? So we try to escape: drugs, sex, relationships, church, family, wealth. Ultimately and eternally, all failing. Messiah's call to the rough is really a call to a relationship with him. And, for that relationship to occur, everything has to be given up. Which really seems rough. That roughness, seen through the eyes of the Father and not through the eyes of the world, is a call to a present and eternal life in the presence of God. Then, what was once perceived as rough is now seen as blessing. The very reason the Father chose to put on the body of a baby, to die a rough death, so today I can know the power and glory of his present and eternal presence.

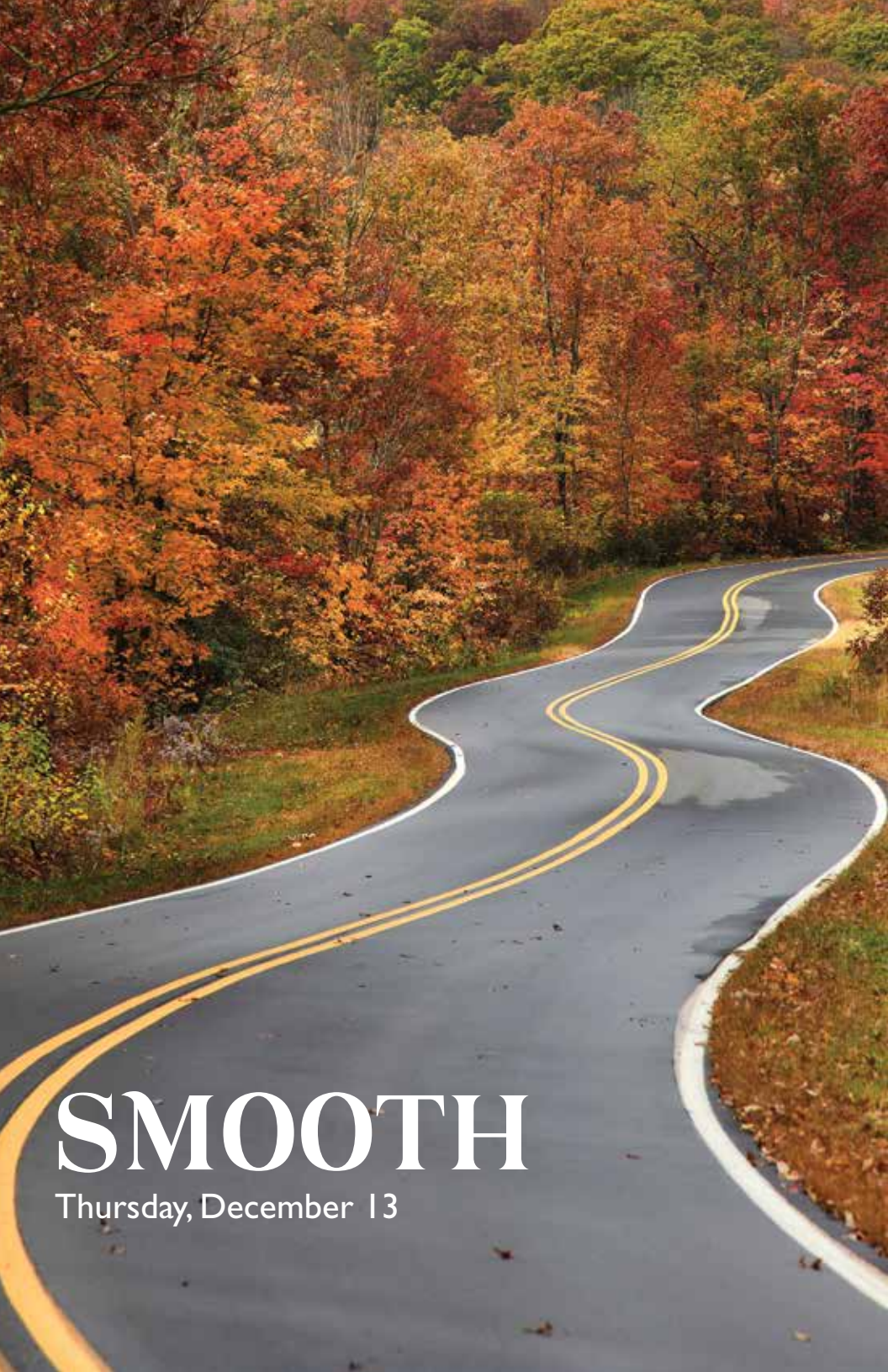
*Doug Brodie*

## **Prayer**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us from the rough places of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent  
Pg. 212 Book of Common Prayer





SMOOTH

Thursday, December 13

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah 40:3

Every time I read or hear this scripture, it makes me remember a performance of Handel's "Messiah." The message is even more compelling when it is sung. Voices soar and then fall with a message that resonates to our inner selves. The music gets to the core.

How many times do I hear this voice each day? It depends if I am listening or just wandering in the wilderness. To make straight a highway for me to travel on is a never-ending endeavor. And it depends on how many deserts are in the way to make that highway straight. So many times in my life the curves and turns have taken me to rough roads and then back to the smooth surface of the highway.

The word of Isaiah urges me to hear a voice that is calling to come out of the wilderness and travel the highway for our God.

*Gloria Hooper*

## **Prayer**

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Travelers

Pg. 831 Book of Common Prayer



# PRUNE

Friday, December 14

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

John 15:1-4

As a young boy I remember spending several Saturdays in February helping my grandfather prune his large fig tree. Granddaddy was so careful about which branches he pruned and a project that seemed like it should only take 30 minutes lasted almost a whole day or two! Over many years I began to learn from him how to prune a fig tree and why he was so careful. He told me that you must always pay attention to which branches produce fruit and which do not. He called the ones that did not produce fruit, suckers. These are the branches that take nutrients away from the fruit bearing parts of the tree. His careful attention to which parts of the tree bore fruit always left him with a bounty of figs during the harvest as well as the healthiest fig tree in Glynn County. The time we spent together taught me more than how to prune a fig tree. It taught me that I, too need to do the internal work of pruning parts of my life that are distractions to my God given calling. We all have pruning that we need to do all the time. We know there are things that distract us from what we are called to do for the sake of the Gospel. What are those things that we need to prune today? Are we willing to ask Jesus, the vinegrower, to help us find those places that need attention?

*Fr. Justin Yawn*

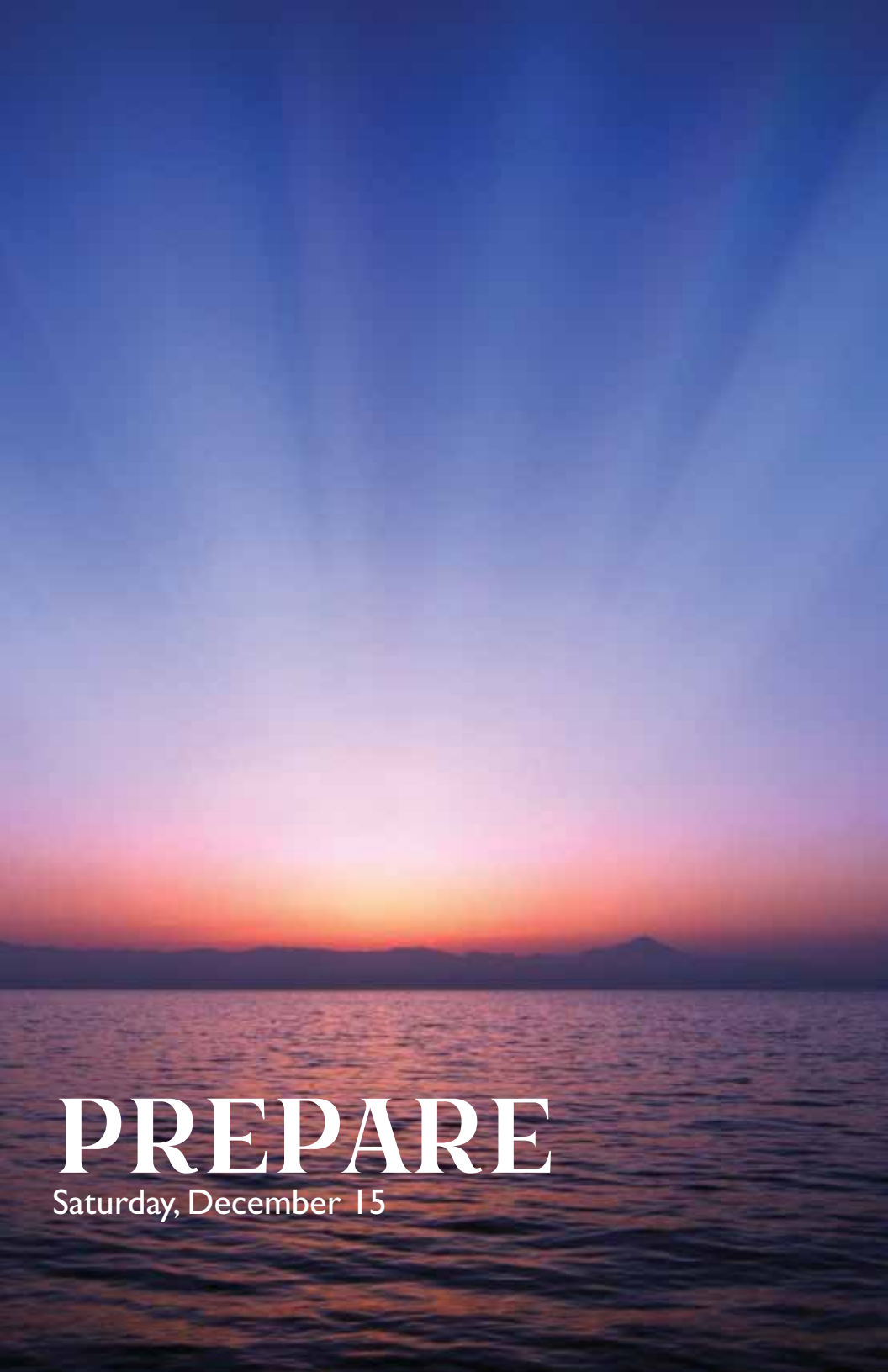
## **Prayer**

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Prayer of Self-Dedication

Pg. 832 Book of Common Prayer





# PREPARE

Saturday, December 15

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:10

Seeing the word “Prepare,” I thought of preparing our hearts for Christ’s coming. After reading Ephesians 2:10 in several translations, I could see this focus is different. Our amazing God created each of us with love and care (see Psalm 139). The Greek word for “handiwork” is “masterpiece.” We are each a masterpiece of God, priceless and perfect in God’s eyes. “Created in Christ Jesus for good works” seems to mean that Jesus, God’s Son, is intimately involved in our creation and our purpose in life – to conduct our daily lives in such harmony with and awareness of Jesus that his spirit guides us naturally into these good works.

These opportunities to bless others, whether in our own families or in a faraway country, were carefully planned and prepared for us by our God, tailored to our individual gifts and talents. Most of us can remember moments we never expected -- for example, when a person or a need came across our path, and the Holy Spirit gently guided us to do or say something -- that turned out to be very important to that person or situation.

How easy it is to miss the spirit’s guidance through self-absorption and distraction. As we walk through these hectic days of Advent, may we intentionally ask God each morning to show us the “good works God has prepared in advance” for us and to make us receptive to God’s voice and direction. Then we will be a blessing to others during Advent and each day of the year.

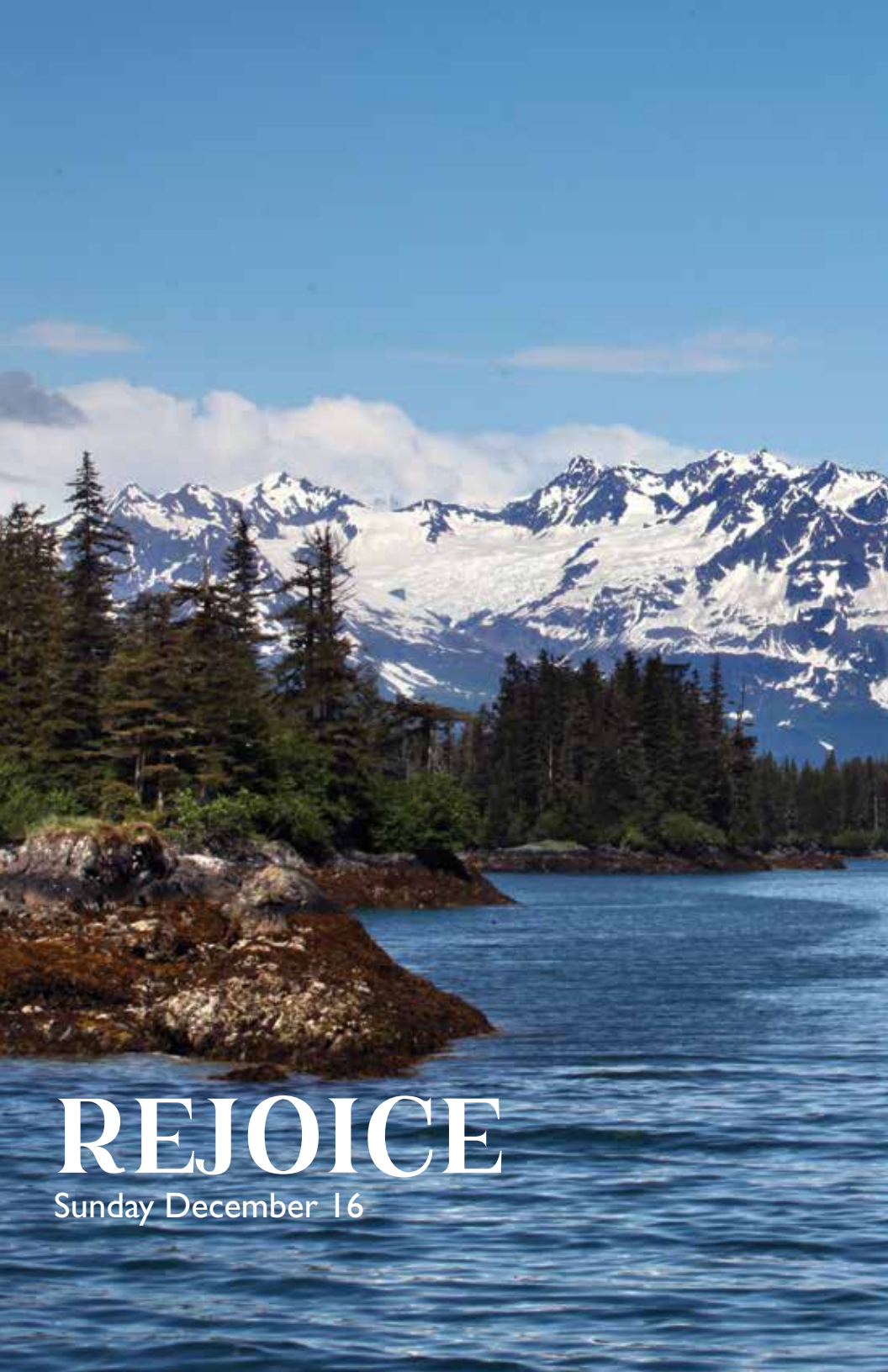
*Robyn Dadig*

## **Prayer**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent

Pg. 211 Book of Common Prayer



# REJOICE

Sunday December 16

For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;  
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

Psalm 92:4

When I was about 13 or so, my grandfather took several members of our family on a fishing adventure to Alaska. To this day, I am still taken aback by the beauty of it all. I look back at these memories and remember many discussions from college football rivalries to life advice. The memories I have of looking at God's creation spreading for miles reminds me daily to rejoice in all of God's blessings. When I think of that magnificent wilderness it also brings back the memories of those conversations I had. In the years that followed all of us have suffered hardships of varying magnitudes and some are no longer with us yet God's beauty gives me the resolve to rejoice daily in the many blessings of this life.

*Ryan McDougal*

## **Prayer**

O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for the Feast of Pentecost

Pg. 227 Book of Common Prayer



# SING

Monday, December 17

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalms 95:1-2

*To Sing: to make musical sounds with the voice, especially words with a set tune.*

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, it is easy. It may not sound great, but it is easy to do! In Psalm 95: 1-2 we are invited to "Come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!" God knows you, and he knows whether you can carry a tune or not . . . part of the joy of serving our God is to realize he doesn't care whether the noise you make is beautiful . . . he wants it to be JOYFUL. The most beautiful sound with a frozen heart is not what he requires. He wants our love for him to be evident in our offering! We know this because we are further encouraged to "Come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!" A thankful heart goes a long way to improve a tired voice! The Seasons of Advent and Christmas bring many opportunities to proclaim the Lord's coming through familiar and beloved hymns and carols. Take every opportunity to sing to him as though no one but God were listening!

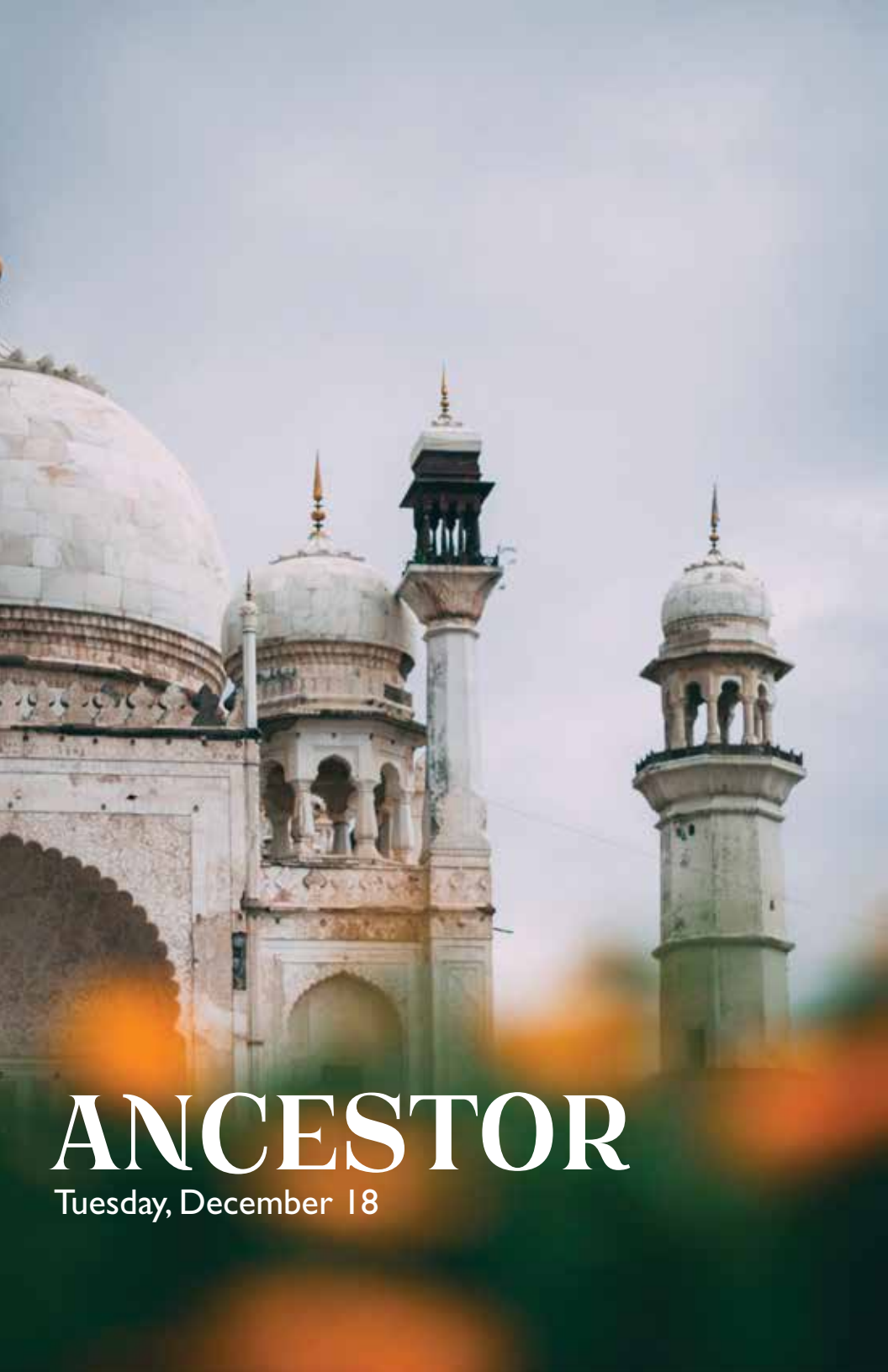
*Pat and Jeff Gorman*

## **Prayer**

O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be ever present with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises offered by your people on earth; and grant to them even now glimpses of your beauty, and make them worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Church Musicians and Artists

Pg. 819 Book of Common Prayer



# ANCESTOR

Tuesday, December 18



It was not with our ancestors that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.

Deuteronomy 5:3

Growing up my parents would frequently tell us how Christianity came to India. In the first century the Apostle Thomas came to spread the Gospel to the Jewish community living in southern India; and gentile Indians were among those new believers. The descendants of those baptized by Saint Thomas are now known as Syrian Christians, also known as, Saint Thomas Christians. My family is proud to say that we can trace our lineage back to a couple of those families. For the past two thousand years, my family has been followers of Christ. I sit in amazement of the fact that while my ancestors and I share an ever diluting bond of blood and DNA, the bond we share in faith and religion has changed very little. Despite the difference in how we received God's word, my ancestors through oral tradition and me through reading my Bible, the stories and lessons are the same. Just as the Jews who escaped Egypt and their descendants share the covenant of the Ten Commandments, all who are alive in Christ share in the Lord's covenant. And that is the greatest bond shared by my ancestors, myself, my son, and generations to come.

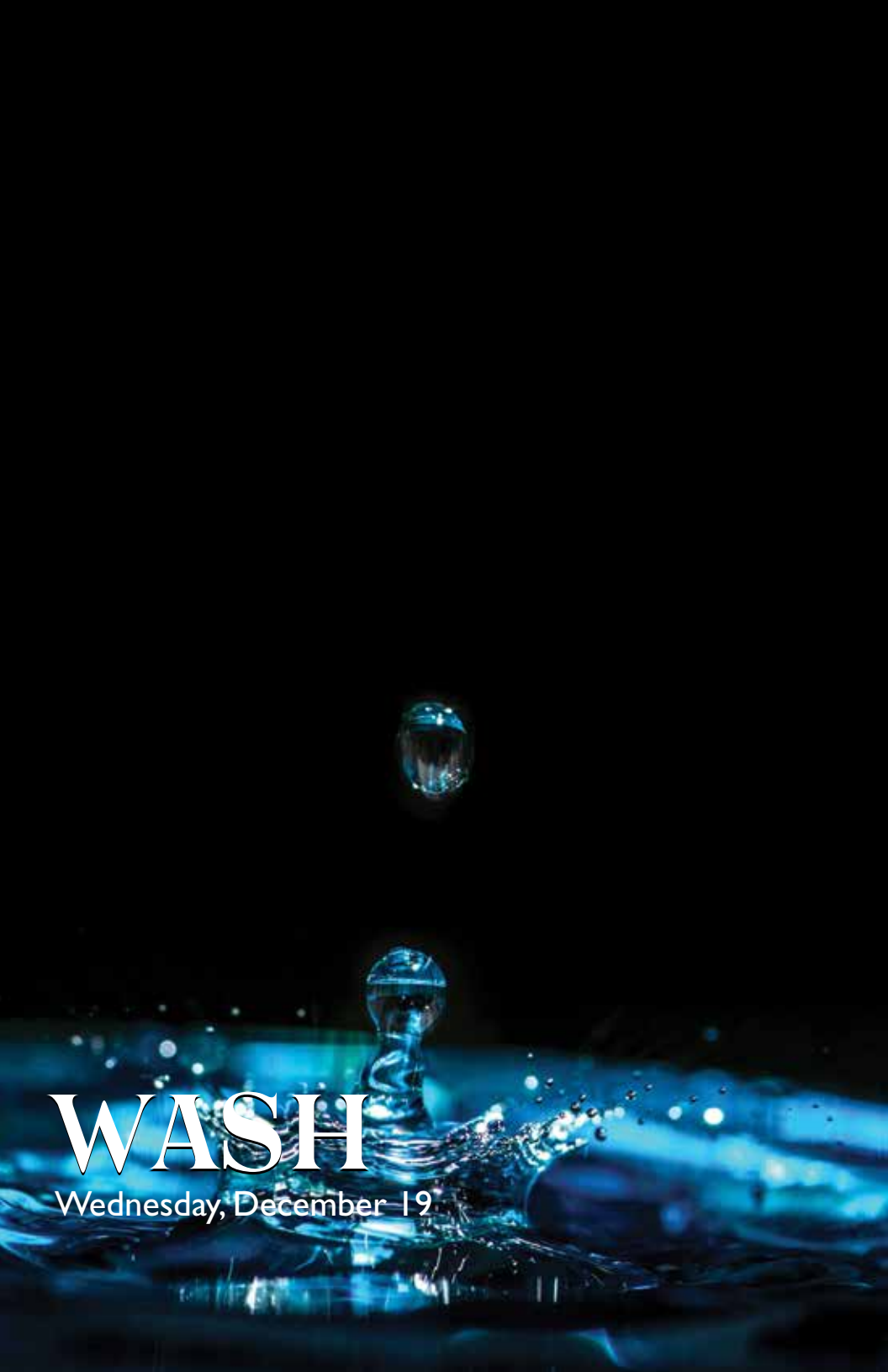
*Linu Samuel*

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Collect for Proper 8

Pg. 230 Book of Common Prayer



WASH

Wednesday, December 19

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

Isaiah 1:16

Early in the first chapter of Isaiah, the people are shown to be rebellious, turning from God by their sins. They turn to meaningless earthly ways, apart from God. In verse 16 God calls the people to wash, to clean themselves and stop sinning.

The sacrament of confession gives us an opportunity to raise our awareness, through self examination and revealing to another person how we have sinned against God. In doing so we face the difficult task of true honesty, baring our soul to another.

As my husband's health was declining a number of years ago, I found myself feeling the heavy burden of sin. I had asked for forgiveness but still had a heavy heart. God told me very clearly to take this heavy heart to his altar and confess to my priest. I was embarrassed and felt humiliated. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done.

The joy I felt when the burden was lifted was indescribable. I felt a newness, a closeness with Jesus Christ. God is truly loving and forgiving. Thank you for loving me, a sinner.

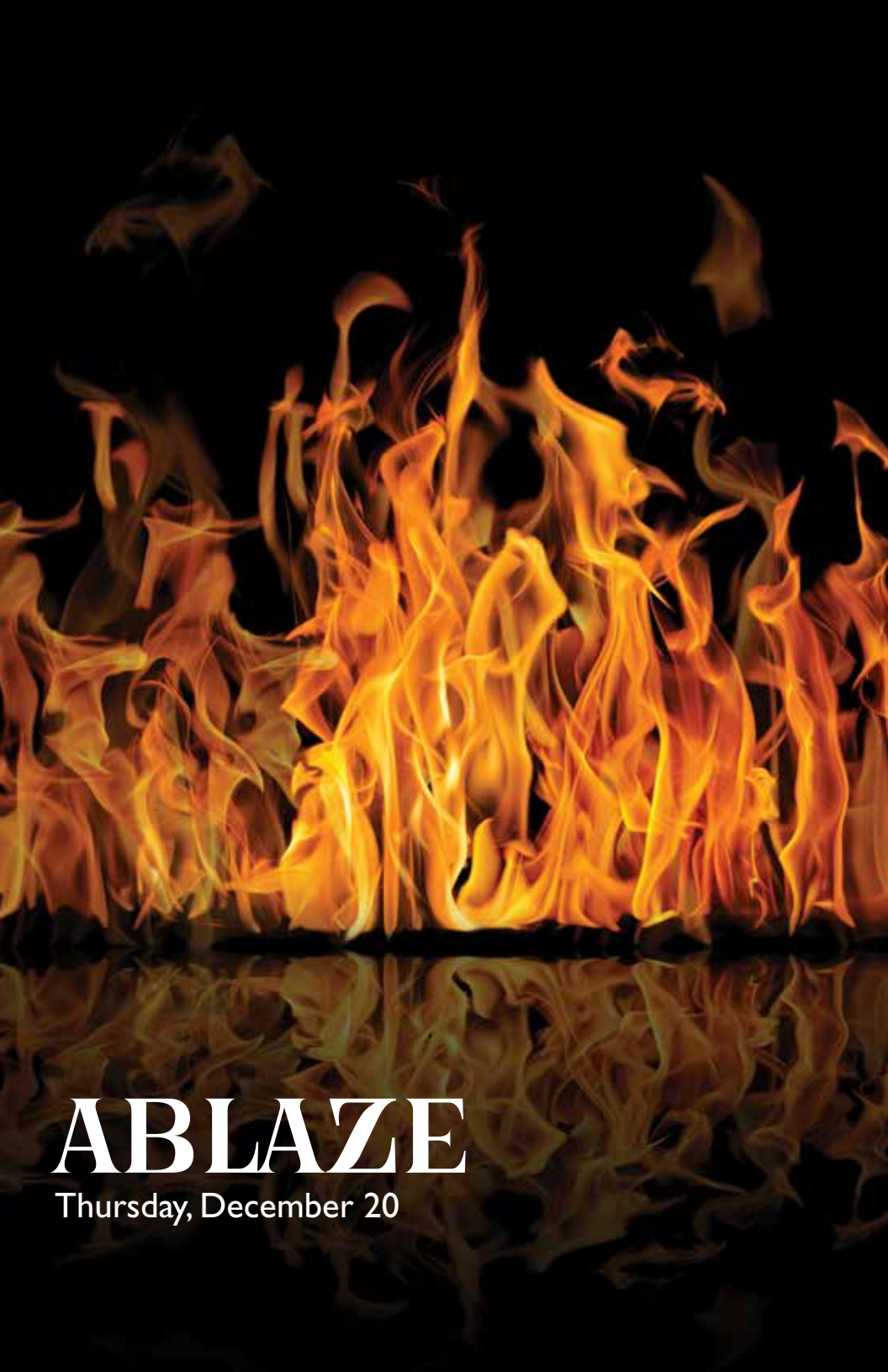
*Jonette Albright*

## **Prayer**

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, wash and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for Proper 13

Pg. 232 Book of Common Prayer



# ABLAZE

Thursday, December 20

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us[a] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Luke 24:32

We had week-long youth revival at the church I attended. For two years I served on the committee to plan meals and lodging for the guest preacher and music minister. For both of those years my family hosted the music minister, Gary, his wife, Valleta, and their two daughters so we got to know their story. One evening while driving home, Valleta, found a drug addict (Gary) passed out in a ditch. She brought him home and nursed him back to health. Never in my life had I known someone so trusting that they would bring a total stranger home with a young daughter. They eventually married and had a daughter together. Gary is so talented and it was a joy to hear him sing. His love for our Lord was so apparent in the words he sang. This set a fire in me to grow in my walk with Jesus. I was 14 the first year Gary and his family stayed with us and I asked my parents if they could stay the second year. I could not wait to visit with them and hear Gary sing again.

*Cheryl Garza*

## **Prayer**

O God, who on the holy mount revealed to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and ablaze: Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold the King in his beauty; who with you, O Father, and you, O Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for The Transfiguration  
Pg. 243 Book of Common Prayer





# SIGN

Friday, December 21

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Matthew 24:3

Signs are important to us in life and we hope we recognize the meaning of each sign. On September 11, 2001, Mike and I were in North Carolina on a business trip and to see his father. That morning we witnessed the horror on a television at our hotel. Later that day we watched as plane after plane landed at the Greensboro airport near our hotel. After two days of waiting to get a flight home, we drove out of the Raleigh airport, headed home in a rental car. With fear in our hearts, but not one map, guide or cell phone to direct us, we drove south and west. Signs on the roads home were important to us, as were the many American flags displayed, showing sign of love for our country. We drove through the day and night, 24 hours, across several states, praying, talking, and anxious for our feeling of safety in our own home. Those road signs got us there.

In Matthew 24.3, the disciples were hoping for a sign from Jesus of the impending end times. We must trust in Jesus and live our lives to be ready with or without that sign.

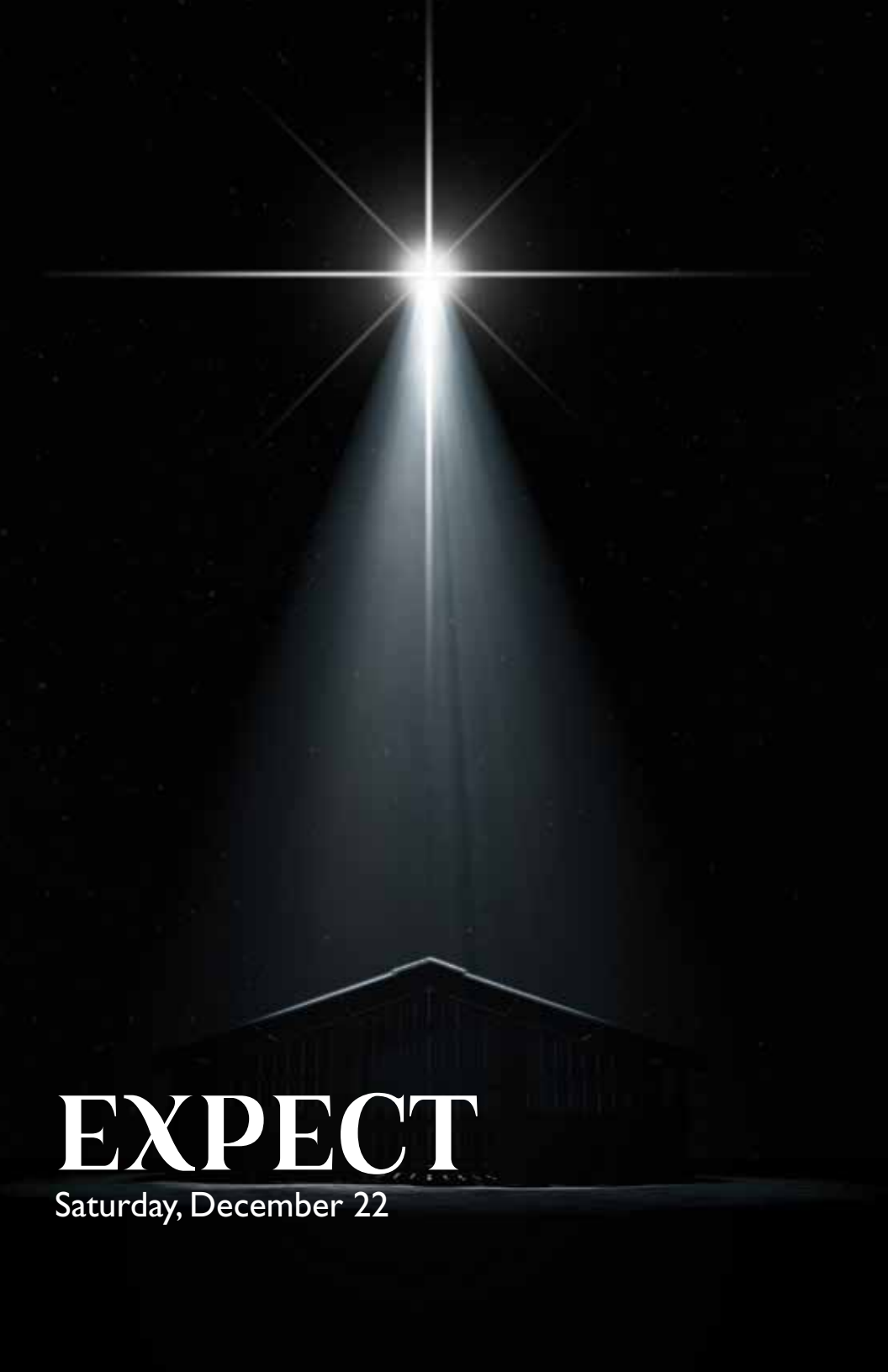
*Susan Shobe*

## **Prayer**

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor; and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

57. Prayer for Guidance

Book of Common Prayer, p.832



# EXPECT

Saturday, December 22

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future....”

Jeremiah 29:11

Cookies to bake. Presents to wrap. Cards to mail. Tree to trim. Shopping to finish. Arrgh! Where did the days go? Can we get it all done? And what happens if we can't finish by Christmas Eve?

Christmas plunges some into feelings of sadness, anger or a strange brew of both. The debris of dashed hopes mixes with a thirst for magical anticipation. Then, these joyful expectations are hopelessly soured when something gets skewed. If only we could have catalog-pretty happy people gathered around Martha Stewart-style gorgeous yuletide table-scapes and sumptuous meals served by an unnamed kitchen staff.

Consider the pregnant Virgin Mary worrying about delivering her baby on the road or in a strange town as she and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because of state-ordered taxation. So many questions, so little time, such a great distance. No doubt, she expected to have an easy delivery, maybe at home around familiar settings among other helpful women friends.

Expectations are worrisome things. Advent calls us to leave unfinished business right there where we left it -- undone, unwrapped and unbaked -- and put our expectations in their proper place. Author Henry David Thoreau decided to leave citified trappings for a pastoral retreat. He wrote, “We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn.” “Infinite expectation of the dawn” guides us beyond the artificial hustle-bustle to a newer, fresher life promised by a baby's birth in a stable.

Advent reminds us that we have other more pressing duties: to discover God's call to our real work -- recommitting ourselves to praying, learning, helping, serving and lifting up others. Only then do we understand why the poor are blessed, how the meek inherit the earth and when comfort comes to those who mourn. Only then do we truly understand how 5,000 can be fed from one boy's lunch pail, how a crippled person can walk again and how a man who died three days before can rise up alive, well and hungry.

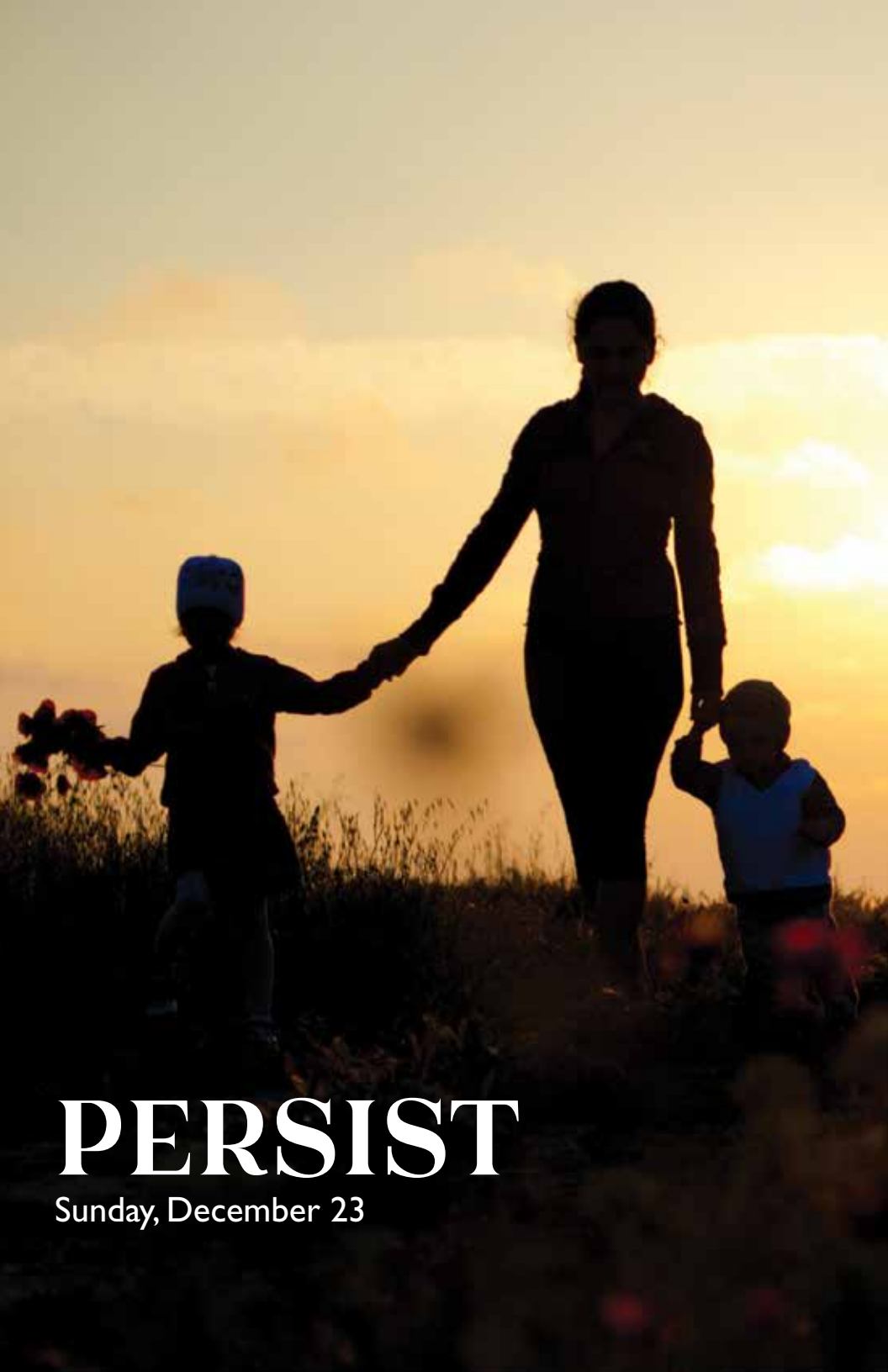
Advent is not a time to fear or be dismayed. Advent calls us to break away our shackles of the season's busy-ness and to look forward to God's call to holy service.

Only then are we truly free of artificial expectations.

*Patty Benoit*

## **Prayer**

Lord: Lift up our eyes away from the demands of this day, and let us see the true light of your word. Give us spiritual nourishment, guide us to the holy mystery of your son's birth, and teach us wisdom to balance the things of earth with the things of heaven. Amen



# PERSIST

Sunday, December 23



“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Luke 11: 9-10

I have always known one day I would be a father. Being the oldest of three I often had the responsibility of taking care of my younger sisters. When Joanna and I married in my mid-twenties, we left our families and moved to Puerto Rico for Joanna to go to school. We knew so much so that we would be parents; we made video recordings on our honeymoon speaking to our unborn child. We were newlyweds and she was very busy with school and we both knew that it was not the time to add to our family. After three years we started to plan to transition into growing our family. It surprised us after another two years we were having trouble getting pregnant. We began add our desire to have children to our prayers. Over the next several years with procedures, medications, and surgeries we were still unable to bring a child into the world. We persisted to ask God to send us a baby of our own. We had pretty much had given up, but we continued to ask God for a baby. Then one day, I curiously opened a letter I got in the mail from my youngest sister, telling me she wanted Joanna and I to be the parents of her unborn child. Joanna and I persisted asking for God's help to have a baby, and he answered with yes. This made me realize that God thinks out side the box. He can see the bigger picture. We asked God for a child, and he sent one. Even though we started to doubt that God was going to answer our prayer, we persisted to ask for his help. I think the key here is God knows what we need even if we don't. We need to be persistent in our faith, and trust that God is listening. Continue to pray, continue to have faith, continue to give thanksgiving, and continue to serve others. His timing is not the same as ours. When God answered our prayers he did it in a way that benefitted many not just Joanna and me, but Aidan, my sister, and I am sure many unknown others.

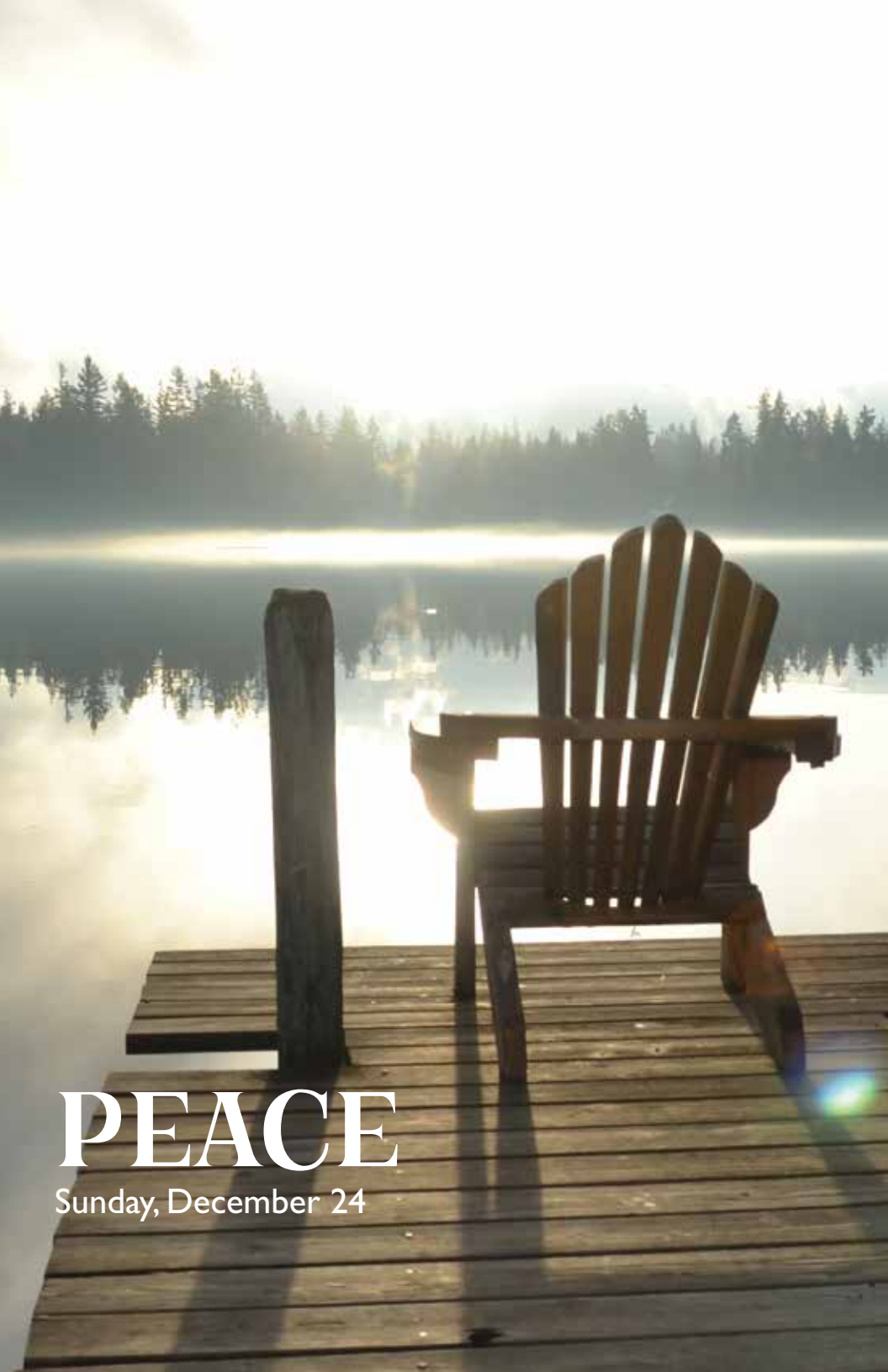
*GA Whitehead*

## **Prayer**

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persist with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from the Collect for Proper 24

Pg. 235 Book of Common Prayer



PEACE

Sunday, December 24

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

This week, I delivered food to a shelter and gave a tour to a friend who had never visited this particular shelter. Her expression said it all. When returning to the car, she and I agreed that we had no real problems and that we were blessed beyond measure.

Tragic circumstances have led me to feel anger, regret and a selfish sense of loss. Yet in retrospect when I am given the opportunity to process the events, I realize that with each moment in life, God gave me the resources to impact my choices and to choose peace. But it was my responsibility to seize the opportunity to rely on him and his plan and not wallow in regret, anger, anxiety or self-pity. Peace doesn't always come from the ease of a situation or the joy found in our happiest moments in life.

Sorting the stuff of a "life fully lived" by several loved ones has filled my days, months and recent years. With the packing of each box, a flood of memories and a resounding sense of being grateful developed as I reviewed the unending reminders of holiday meals, fishing trips, and milestones of my family life. Sometimes, the find of the day was a picture; and other times it was a long-forgotten item from a trip or excursion. One day I discovered my father's notes from his reflections on growing up in Cameron and early days of practicing law. Another day I found a stack of unfinished handwork including an unfinished sweater started by my mother. And then on another occasion, I found the photos of when my husband and I were moving into our house where we lived for 21 years together.

Each find resulted in an emotional journey down memory lane. My heart fills with a sense of amazement when I realize that I had the privilege of living such a full life and sharing many wonderful experiences with a loving family when my circumstances could have been so different.

I reflect on the families who find respite in the shelter and know that their journey was not full of those same boxes and comforting memories.

I am humbled by God's mercy shown to me. I find peace in the Lord through the Word of Christ. My boxes are full of gratitude.

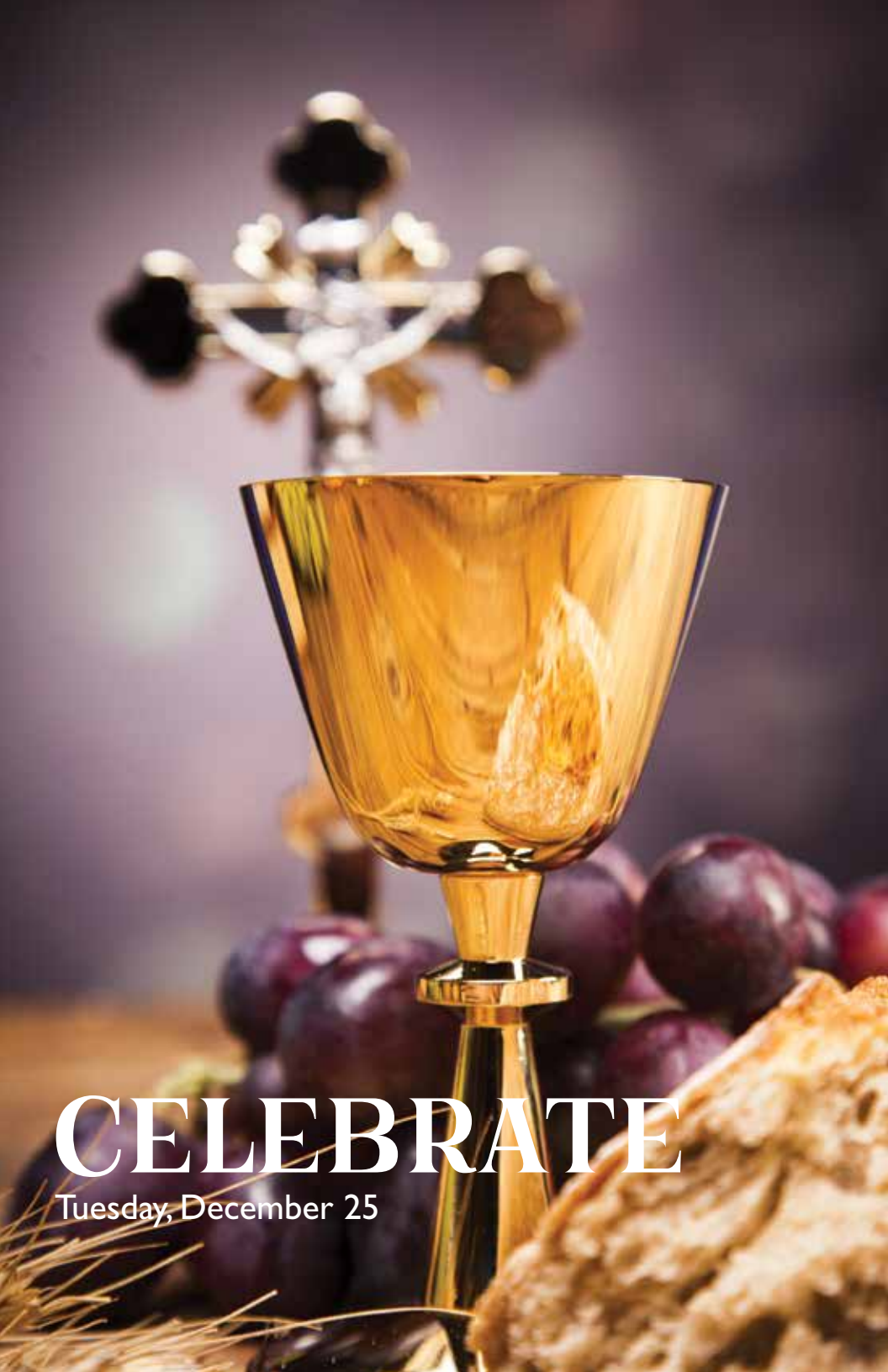
*Mary Black Pearson*

## **Prayer**

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer for Peace

Pg. 815 Book of Common Prayer



# CELEBRATE

Tuesday, December 25

Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:8

When you read this passage in the many different variations of the text, it's beginning is what stands out the most to me. In versions such as English Standard Version it starts off as celebrating the festival. In the King James it says "keeping the feast." To me it talks of the Eucharist and how as a community we come together to celebrate our Christian faith. We come together as group of people who have a common belief and in return it is the Eucharist that replenishes us. Likewise, the aAdvent season is a time for us to be together to break bread and let the season replenish our souls with the news of the new born king. The old cliché of "there's a reason for the season" rings true in this passage as I relate it to the Advent season. As a somewhat new father it is that sentiment that I am excited to pass on to our daughter. I look forward to watching a little tiny girl grow in to a woman and hopefully instill in her the true meaning of things in our faith such as Advent. The Advent season is a true time of warmth, togetherness, and time of celebration of why we gather at the rail.

*John L. Burgess IV*

## **Prayer**

O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may celebrate you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Adapted from the Prayer for Before Worship

Pg. 833 Book of Common Prayer



