

Advent Ritual 2018

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Image: *Wise Women Also Came* © Jan Richardson

Wise women also came,
seeking no directions,
no permission
from any king.
They came
by their own authority,
their own desire,
their own longing.
Wise women also came,
and they brought
useful gifts:

water for labour's washing,
fire for warm illumination,
a blanket for swaddling.
Wise women also came,
at least three of them,
holding Mary in the labour,
crying out with her
in the birth pangs,
breathing ancient blessings
into her ear.

Acknowledgement of Country

Gwen Doan rsm

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians
of the land on which we live, work and gather.

We pay our respects to Elders,
past, present and emerging,
as the holders of the memories,
traditions, culture and spiritual wellbeing
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
across the nation.

*All: In the spirit of reconciliation,
partnership and mutual respect,
we will continue to work together
to shape a society which responds
to the needs and aspirations
of all who call Australia home.*

Welcome



Into the Quiet

(Liam Lawton)

Into the quiet God calls you,
calls you each by name.
Into the quiet, God calls you.
Enter God's dwelling,
God's love foretelling
on this day of days. *(repeat)*

Introduction

Catherine Reuter rsm

Advent is a season of deep memory,
a time when we are called to hear again
the ancient stories of the God
who has journeyed with us
from the beginning, and who,
in the fullness of time,
took on flesh,
and came to walk in this world with us.

This morning, we have the opportunity
to gather in the season of Advent
to reflect on:



Madonna Josey rsm

- ~ the voice crying out in the wilderness
calling for new ways of seeing and living;
- ~ a young Jewish woman
surprised by a heavenly visitation;
- ~ the Word enfleshed, living among us,
a light shining in the darkness;
- ~ and three wise ones setting off from afar
following a star, gifting the child.

Into the Quiet

(Liam Lawton)

Into the quiet God calls you,
calls you each by name.
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Enter God's dwelling,
God's love foretelling
on this day of days.

(repeat)



Lighting of the Candle

Catherine Reuter rsm

As we set our feet on our annual pilgrimage
through Advent to Christmas and beyond
we light a candle for all bearers
of the Good News –
prophets, saints, ordinary women
and men, who, throughout the ages,
have carried the light of grace and truth
and placed it into our hands.

*All: May we who now carry
 this Sacred Story
 journey with courage,
 hope and joy.*

*Candle lit at each table and passed hand to hand
as we pause to remember and give thanks
for those who carried the light to us.*



An Offering of Reflections

Catherine Reuter rsm

Today we offer reflections
that may draw you
into the mystery and possibility
of this season.

Take time to look at the offerings,
which are the work of *Jan Richardson*
(artist, poet and ordained minister).

Each reflection is composed of
an image, verses of scripture,
focussing words
and a poem.

Choose 1 or 2 of the offerings
to reflect upon
in silence for 25 minutes.

Enter into this time in the way
that works best for you,
at your table or elsewhere.

You may wish to record your reflections
in the space provided.



This will be followed by a time of sharing
with your table companions.

Reflection 1

John the Baptiser



Image: *Testify to the Light* © Jan Richardson



*There was a man sent from God,
whose name was John.
He came as a witness to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.*
(John 1:6,7)

The gift that God holds out to us in this season is to carry the light, yes, but also to see in the dark and shadows a presence that guides the way.

It is no small thing to bear witness to the light when everything seems dark. We reflect on that light that finds its ways into the unlikeliest places, the light that causes us (like John the Baptizer) to testify to its presence in the deepest shadows.

It matters that we hold the light for one another. It matters that we bear witness to the Light that holds us all, that we testify to this Light that shines its infinite love and mercy on us across oceans, across borders, across time.

In this Advent time, may we bear this light for one another, and may Christ our Light go with us and illumine our way.

Who holds the light for you?



In this season, who might need you to hold
the light for them in acts of love and grace?

Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light

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Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow and grief.
Blessed are you
in whom
the light lives,
in whom

the brightness blazes -
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith
in stubborn hope
in love that illumines
every broken thing
it finds.



My Reflections



Reflection 2

Gabriel and Mary

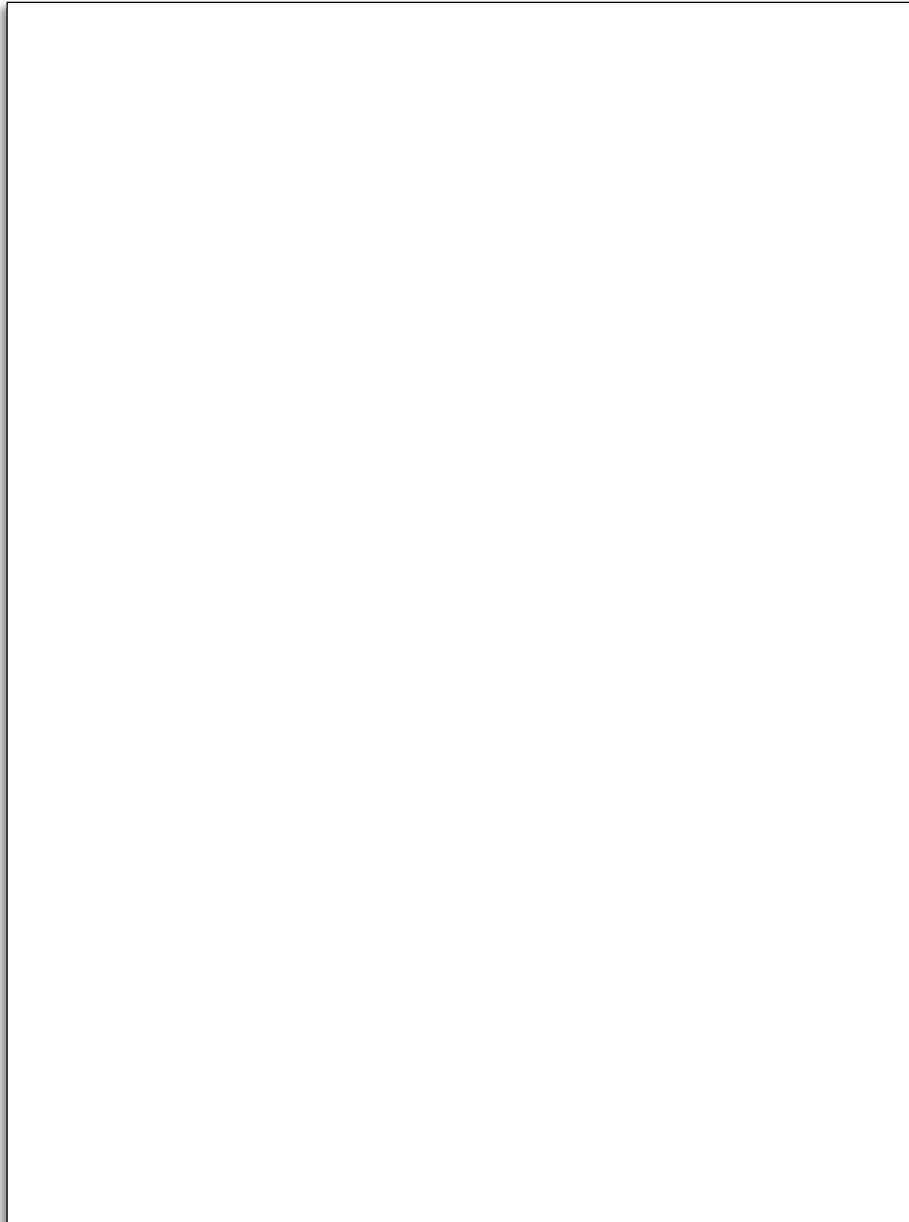


Image: *Gabriel and Mary* © Jan Richardson

*The angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a town called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed to man named Joseph,
and the virgin's name was Mary.*
(Luke 1:26)

When Mary says 'let it be' to the archangel, it is an act of radical surrender.

She offers her 'yes' not with the meek passivity that history has so often ascribed to her; this kind of surrender is born not of weakness but of a daring strength within her and a stunning grace that shows up to sustain her.

Mary's surrender is deliberate, the choice of a woman ready to give herself to the sacred with such abandon that she agrees, with intention, to give up every last plan she had for her life.

Mary's audacious 'yes' propels her on a path almost completely devoid of signposts or trails left by others; she chooses a road utterly unlike any she had ever imagined for herself.

What must it have been like to walk a way she could hardly perceive, while carrying within herself



- in her heart and womb and bones - a light unlike
any the world had ever seen?

What must it have been like for the archangel
who witnessed Mary's 'yes'?

Gabriel's Annunciation

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For a moment
I hesitated
on the threshold.
For the space
of a breath
I paused,
unwilling to disturb
her last ordinary
moment,
knowing that the
next step would cleave
her life:
that this day
would slice her story
in two,
dividing all the days
before

from all the ones
to come.

The artists would later
depict the scene:
Mary dazzled
by the archangel,
her head bowed
in humble assent,
awed by the messenger
who condescended
to leave paradise
to bestow such an
honour
upon a woman, and
mortal.



Yet I tell you
it was I
who was dazzled,
I who found myself
agape
when I came upon her -
reading, at the loom, in
the kitchen,
I cannot now recall;
only that the woman
before me -
blessed and full of
grace
long before I called her
so - shimmered
with how completely
she inhabited herself,
inhabited the space
around her,
inhabited the moment
that hung between us.

I wanted to save her
from what I had been
sent to say.
Yet when the time
came,

when I had stammered
the invitation
(history would not
record the sweat on my
brow, the pounding of
my heart; would not
note that I said
Do not be afraid
to myself as much as
to her)
it was she
who saved me -
her first deliverance -
her Let it be
not just declaration
to the Divine
but a word of solace,
of soothing, of
benediction
for the angel
in the doorway
who would hesitate
one last time -
just for the space
of a breath
torn from his chest -
before wrenching



himself away
from her radiant
consent,

her beautiful and
awful yes.

My Reflections



Reflection 3

Christmas Eve



Image: *This Luminous Darkness* © Jan Richardson



*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God
What has come into being
in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.*
(Prologue of John's Gospel)

This is how John tells the Christmas story in his gospel: there is no manger, no inn to be turned away from; there are no angels, no shepherds, no wise men. John leaves these matters to others.

John pares away the Christmas story to its essence:

The Word. Light. Life. Dwelling among us.
In the flesh. Glory and grace and truth.

In the spirit of John the Evangelist we pray that we may tell the story, that we may testify to the light, that the Word may take flesh in us this day and in all the days to come.



We open ourselves, in these hours, in these days,
to God radiantly illuminating us in ways we cannot
see or feel or know.

Let us open ourselves toward that light. May we
open our eyes, our hands, our hearts to meet it.
May we lean into the light that begins in the
deepest dark, bearing itself into this world for us.

How the Light Comes

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I cannot tell you
how the light comes.
What I know
is that it is more
ancient
than imagining.
That it travels
across an astounding
expanse
to reach us.
That it loves
searching out
what is hidden,
what is lost,

what is forgotten
or in peril
or in pain.
That it has a fondness
for the body,
for finding its way
toward flesh,
for tracing the edges
of form,
for shining forth
through the eye,
the hand,
the heart.



I cannot tell you
how the light comes,
but that it does.
That it will.

That it works
its way
into the deepest dark
that enfolds you,
though it may seem
long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape
you did not foresee.

And so
may we this day
turn ourselves
toward it.

May we lift our faces
to let it find us.

May we bend our
bodies
to follow the arc
it makes.

May we open
and open more
and open still
to the blessed light
that comes.



My Reflections



Reflection 4

The Magi



Image: *By Another Road* © Jan Richardson



*And having been warned in a dream
not to return to Herod,
they left for their own country by another road.*
(Matthew 2.12)

The Christmas season ends with Epiphany, a feast day in which the early church celebrated Jesus' brilliant manifestation (*epiphaneia* in Greek, also translated as "appearing") not only to the Magi but also to the world through his birth, baptism, and first recorded miracle at the wedding at Cana.

Eastern Christianity maintains this multifaceted celebration of Epiphany, while we in the West focus primarily on remembering and celebrating the arrival of the Magi, those mysterious and devoted Wise Ones who travelled far to welcome the Christ and offer their gifts.

As we travel toward Epiphany and savour the final days of Christmas, this is a good time to ponder where we are in our journey.

As we cross into the coming year, where do you find yourself on the path?

What direction do you feel drawn to go in during the coming weeks and months?



Is there anything you need to let go of - or to find -
in order to take the next step?

In the coming months, what gift do you most need
to offer, that only you can give?

Blessing of the Magi

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There is no reversing
this road.
The path that bore you
here
goes in one direction
only,
every step drawing you
down a way
by which you will not
return.

you had spent all
to find.
When you laid down
your gift,
release came
with such ease,
your treasure tumbling
from your hands
in awe and
benediction.

You thought arrival
was everything,
that your entire journey
ended with kneeling
in the place

Now the knowledge
of your leaving
comes like a stone laid
over your heart,
the familiar path closed



and not even the solace
of a star
to guide your way.

You will set out in fear.
You will set out in
dream.
But you will set out by
that other road
that lies in shadow
and in dark.

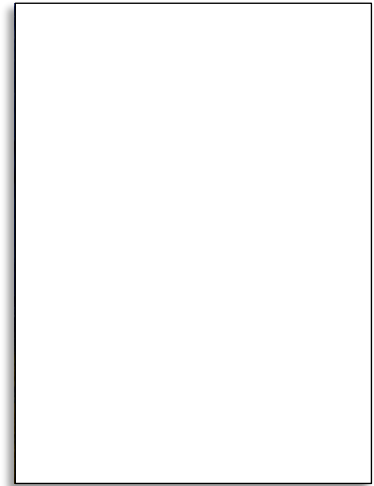
We cannot show you
the route that will
take you home;
that way is yours

and will be found
in the walking.

But we tell you,
you will wonder
at how the light you
thought you had left
behind goes with you,
spilling from
your empty hands,
shimmering beneath
your homeward feet,
illuminating the road
with every step
you take.



My Reflections



Sharing

Catherine Reuter rsm

You are invited to entrust your reflections
to your table companions for about 15 minutes.



Prayer Response

Catherine Reuter rsm

The timeless message of Advent
can be beautifully and powerfully personal,
but is never just for us alone.

All:

*The Word comes to us with hope,
with grace, with love, and takes flesh in us
for the life of the world.
In us, may Christ continue to be born,
in this and every season.*

Giftng of our 2019 Mercy Calendar

Our special thanks to:

*the Sisters at Nudgee who invited Maree Hutchinson
into a quiet space in their garden;
Maree who sees with the eyes of her heart and created
the images;*

*Mary Lawson who sourced the sacred words which
will accompany us each month, and who, with
Gaëlle Rahmé, edited and prepared the calendar for
print*



Celebration of Thanks for

*Veronica Ekerick rsm, Patricia Kirchner rsm,
Mary Lawson rsm, Mary Pescott rsm
and Catherine Reuter rsm*



*Brisbane Sisters of Mercy
Congregation Leadership Team
2013 - 2018*

Maria Sullivan rsm

Catherine, Patricia, Mary,
Veronica and Mary,
today we celebrate the myriad ways
your ministry of leadership has been
expressed within and among us.

Collage of Memories

Naming our thanks

Maria Sullivan rsm

Across the past five years each of you
has shaped and gifted our journey
with the generous sharing of significant
and differing gifts.

For this we give thanks:



Sandra Loth rsm

For empathy, respect and intuitive hearts. *(Pause)*

For vision, courage and challenge. *(Pause)*

All: We give thanks with grateful hearts.

Margaret King rsm

For openness, integrity and risk-taking. *(Pause)*

For enthusiasm, creativity and playfulness. *(Pause)*

All: We give thanks with grateful hearts.

Jo Dooley rsm

For struggle, resolve and patient endurance.
(Pause)

For compassion, encouragement and generosity
of spirit. *(Pause)*

All: We give thanks with grateful hearts.



Jill Stringer rsm

For humility, deep listening and discernment.

(Pause)

For welcoming, nurturing and encouraging our
gifts.

(Pause)

All: We give thanks with grateful hearts.

Chris Watt rsm

For prayerfulness, fragility and forgiveness given
and received.

(Pause)

For the aloneness, the unknown and the unseen.

(Pause)

All: We give thanks with grateful hearts.

Maria Sullivan rsm

In the quiet space of our hearts,
we remember and give thanks
that we have been drawn



by God's Spirit into the Heart of Mercy
through your leadership and that of
Pope Francis.

(Pause)

Words of Appreciation *Mary O'Donoghue rsm*

Gifts

Blessing

*This Day We Say Grateful
A Sending Blessing*

Mary Lawson rsm

It is a strange thing
to be so bound
and so released
all in the same moment,
to feel the heart
open wide
and wider still
even as it turns
to take its leave.



On this day,
let us say
this is simply the way
love moves
in its ceaseless spiralling,
turning us
toward one another,
then sending us
into what waits for us
with arms open wide
in welcome
and in hope.

Mary Johnson rsm

On this day,
in this place
where you have
poured yourself out,

where you have been
emptied
and filled
and emptied again,



may you be aware
more than ever
of what your heart
has opened to
here,

what it has tended
and welcomed
here,

where it has broken
in love and in grief,

where it has given
and received blessing
in the unfathomable mystery
that moves us,
undoes us,
and remakes us
finally
for joy.

This day
may you know
this joy
in full measure.



This day
may you know
this blessing
that gathers you in
and sends you forth
but will not
forget you.

All:

*This day we say 'grace',
this day we say 'grateful',
this day we say 'blessing',*

*this day we release you
in God's keeping*

*and hold you
in gladness and love.*

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Maria Sullivan rsm:

We sing now of the timeless circle
of grace and mercy
that enfolds and encompasses us
in every moment.

Song

The Circle of Mercy

(Jeannette Goglia rsm)

In Mercy, we touch the hearts of those
who are in mis'ry.

In Mercy, we're touched by them
and feel their strength and courage.

In Mercy, we heal the pain of those
who are in sorrow.

In Mercy, we're healed by them
and see the face of hope.

*For the circle of Mercy is timeless
It is spirit of life itself!
Which roots us in faith, and lifts us in hope,
And holds us in God's loving care.
And holds us in God's loving care.*



In Mercy, we welcome those
the world has left rejected.

In Mercy, we're drawn within
the loving heart of God.

In Mercy, we forgive the incompleteness
in another.

In Mercy, our sins are healed
and we are whole again.

*For the circle of Mercy is timeless
It is spirit of life itself!
Which roots us in faith, and lifts us in hope,
And holds us in God's loving care.
And holds us in God's loving care.*

In Mercy, the Spirit-faith will root us
in God's presence.

In Mercy, the Spirit-hope will lift us
out of doubt.

In Mercy, the love of God will be
our joy in living.

In Mercy, we join with one another
on our journey.

*For the circle of Mercy is timeless
It is spirit of life itself!
Which roots us in faith, and lifts us in hope,
And holds us in God's loving care.
And holds us in God's loving care.*



Acknowledgements

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Celebrating Community & Table

*Loving God,
bless all gathered here today
as we come together in friendship
and celebration.*

*Bless those who prepared this meal
and those who serve it.*

*Bless all who have contributed
to making today a special occasion.*

*May the meal that we share remind us
of Your gracious faithful care and abundance.*

*Place in our hearts
the desire to make a difference
in the lives of those
who do not experience community,
friendship, food and peace,
especially this Christmas.*

Amen.

