

ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks.

Tonight the Church begins our final countdown to the Nativity in an ancient prayer known as the "O Antiphons." The titles of Jesus are honored in this prayer, encapsulated in the familiar hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." We voice our longing for the holy arrival: O Come Emmanuel, Wisdom, Mighty Lord, Rod of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, Desire of Nations! And we hear the celestial reassurance: "Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel."

This assurance gives us the name of Advent's third Sunday as well: Gaudete, or Rejoice Sunday. The liturgical color rose offers a grateful glimpse of dawn in the deep violet of December's darkness. The night is far spent; the day draws near. A mere seven

verses lie between us and the desire of our hearts. Hang on, sisters and brothers!

» *Paul suggests we pray without ceasing. Try singing your way to the Nativity with the O Antiphons. Reflect on the meaning of each name. What does it tell you about Jesus?*

#### GOSPEL

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

"Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"

It's always hard for us to discover ourselves as the source of disappointment to others. It's distressing to feel like we let down our parents or mentors, the people who invested their hopes in us. We also don't

want to be a source of buyer's resource for our friends, who thought we were better than this.

John the Baptist weathered the crisis of being a serious disappointment to the multitudes that sought his baptism. Even more so, his execution by King Herod would be a tremendous blow to his many disciples—including the apostle Philip, who once followed John before he pointed toward Jesus. John never claimed to be the great white hope people imagined him to be: not the Messiah, not the reincarnation of Elijah, not "the one who is to come." John was content to "decrease," so that Jesus might "increase."

» *Do you know when it's time to shine, and when to withdraw so that others might share their light?*

## December 24 GOD HAS A PLAN

LECTIONARY 11B  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

#### FIRST READING

2 SAMUEL 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

"Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me."

Boredom leads to restlessness, which sometimes leads to flawed decision-making. My bored hours veer toward ludicrous dietary indiscretions. Does anyone really need three servings of ice cream?

When King David's military victories resulted in a season of peace, he didn't know what to do with himself. He needed a hobby. He thought he might build God a temple. David's prophet-mentor Nathan signed off on the plan initially. Nathan remembered that, last time the King was bored, he acquired Bathsheba and eliminated her husband. Temple-building seemed innocent by comparison! But God had other plans. God's blueprints included building the house of David—a roomy dynasty that would one day produce a King of Kings.

» *Are you more creative or destructive with your*

*downtime? Consider consecrating unscheduled time to God's purposes.*

#### SECOND READING

ROMANS 16:25-27

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever and ever!

Mystics crave understanding the way the rest of us want chocolate.

Mystics contemplate the past, seeking patterns of grace. They study their own generation, observing the virtue and vice of culture. Mystics weave from the past and present a vision of future possibilities. They offer the fruits of their rich meditation to us. Most of us still settle for chocolate.

Still, the mystics won't leave us alone in our ignorance. St. Paul peels back layers of revelation hidden in the past, in law and prophecy, and proclaims it to the Church. He shouts the gospel of Jesus in public squares and continues his argument from our ambos every Sunday. We slumber on. We resist having our obliviousness interrupted. God's wisdom

will not give up on us. God's word is launched into this world, an incarnate truth that wants to be heard.

» *We're moments from our celebration of incarnate truth. Will we wake up in time to perceive it? How will we share what we know along with the chocolates?*

#### GOSPEL

LUKE 1:26-38

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

The liturgical calendar sometimes plays tricks on us. This year, Sunday begins as the Fourth Sunday of Advent and ends as Christmas Eve. The angel Gabriel arrives on Mary's doorstep in the morning, announcing her conception. By midnight, she gives birth to Emmanuel. What a day our Mary has had!

As funny as it seems, today's calendar collision is also a keyhole into the mysteries of God. The word of God is barely spoken before it's realized. In

what John proclaimed:  
er than I is coming

until the Baptist shows  
advance man of Israel's  
of liberation. The Jewish  
as on the lookout for some-  
to roll out the red carpet  
ic era. Observant Jews still  
y chair for Elijah at the table  
e Baptist, so to speak, sat  
chair quite brazenly. His wild  
made him seem Elijah-like  
vince a lot of people that  
ad arrived. And so had the  
were hoping for.

ood advance man, John  
nt himself as the main  
ps pointing outward, to the  
n the way. We too should  
d into thinking religion  
itself, or that religious  
e ones we follow. Jesus is  
est is helpful signage to get  
t.

ave been forerunners  
faith: family members,  
s, friends, saints?

the future, and what are you  
to get there?

a list of things about the  
t reality that need to  
e. Name one thing you  
to bring that change  
ing.

#### DING

ANS 5:16-24

ys. Pray without

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