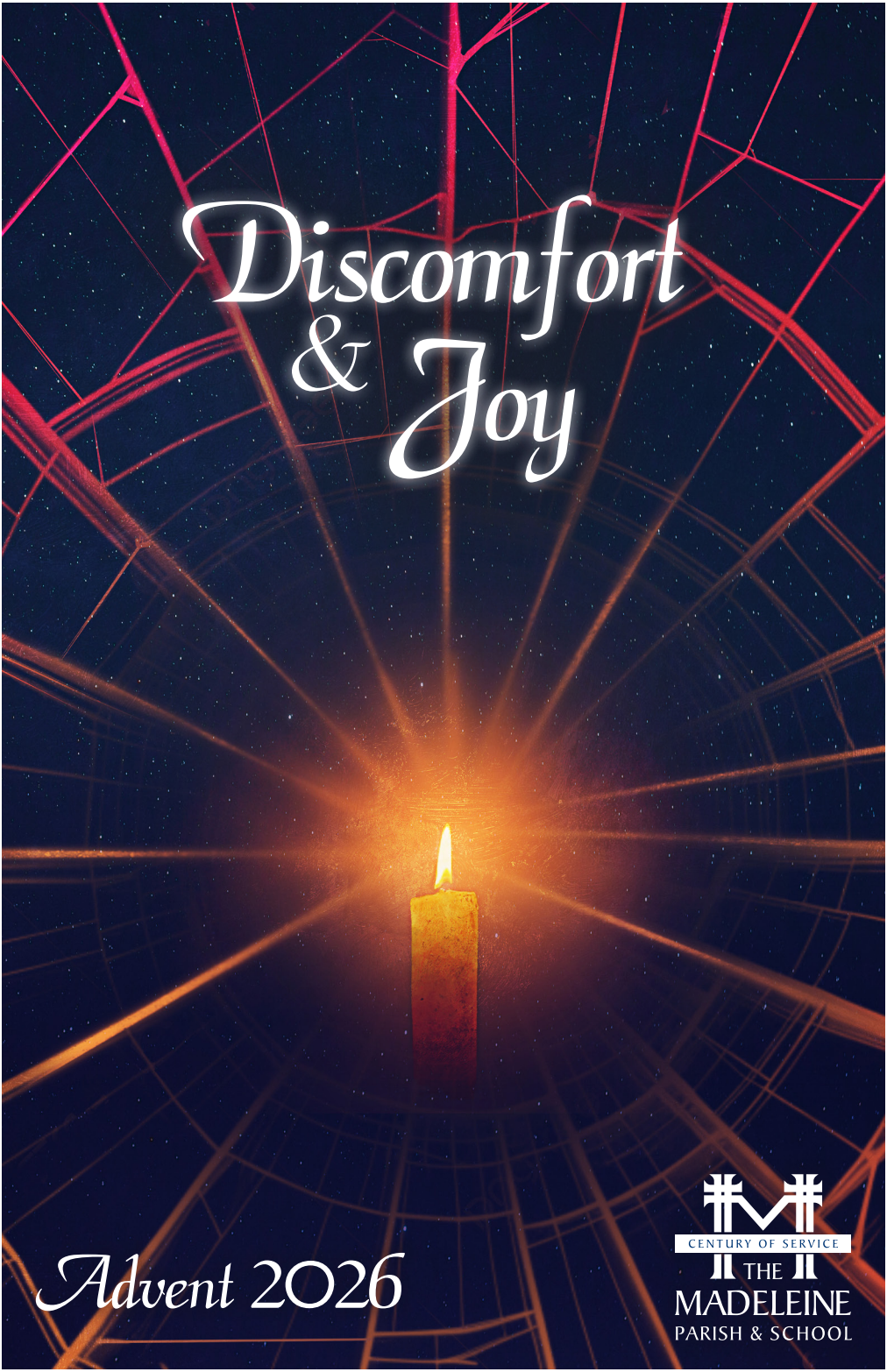

Discomfort
& Joy
Advent 2026
CENTURY OF SERVICE
THE
MADELEINE
PARISH & SCHOOL

Come, Lord Jesus, Come

Music: African Spiritual
Lyrics: Marilyn Robb

Come, Lord Jesus, come
Come by here
Calm our restless hearts,
Come by here,
Come, Lord Jesus, come,
Bring us peace.
O Lord, come by here.

Come, Lord Jesus, come
Come by here.
Bless us with your love,
Come by here
Come, Lord Jesus, come
Be our hope,
O Lord, come by here.

Come, Lord Jesus, come
Come by here
Take our burdens, Lord,
Come by here.
Come, Lord Jesus, come
Set us free,
O Lord, come by here.

Come, Lord Jesus come,
Come by here.
Fill our hearts with joy.
Come by here.
Star of Bethlehem,
Light the way.
O Lord, come by here.

Dear Parish family and friends,

My original theme for Advent this year was "Comfort and Joy." But as I focused on the gospel readings and gathered my thoughts, I found more discomfort than comfort. So here begins our Advent journey of 2026. Let us face the discomforts in our lives, exchange them for comforts and live in the joy of our newborn Savior.

A big thank you to all of you who shared your thoughts and faith on these pages. I especially want to thank our high school seniors, Luke Glavan, Lucy Krug, and Siddharth Modha, who as young people growing up in this parish, often wrote reflections for these booklets. God bless you as you take your faith out into the world.

Once again, the artwork by Hugh Hammons illustrates our theme with a tangled network of discomfort lit by a candle of joy, which reminds us that no matter how chaotic our lives seem, the light of Christ is always with us.

The Sunday meditations are based on the scripture readings for the day and are meant to be shared. The daily reflections can be shared or read privately.

Thank you to Hugh and the production staff who made this booklet possible. Also, a special thank you to Fr. Bonaventure, whose leadership and faith guide this parish.

May you journey well through this Advent season and find the comfort and joy that comes from God's newborn Son.

—Marilyn Robb

First Sunday of Advent

The Discomfort of Chaos, the Joy of Peace

Introduction

Having been a teacher or student for much of my life, I often have recurring nightmares of being unprepared. As a student, I find myself unprepared to take a test or give a report on an unknown subject, because I had not read the assignments, done the homework, or attended class. As a college student, and being responsible for myself for the first time, it was easy to join a friend in the coffee shop or go for a walk with the current "love of my life," instead of attending class. As a teacher, I have nightmares of being in an unfamiliar building, walking up and down staircases, and roaming around strange hallways looking for my classroom. When I finally find my classroom, it is full of students sitting patiently, waiting for me to begin teaching them something new and amazing, but my mind is blank. Once again, I have not prepared for this moment and don't know what to say or do, let alone teach a lesson.

In Sunday's gospel, Jesus informs the disciples that he would soon be leaving them to return to his Father, but he would eventually return. He cautions them to stay alert and prepared for that day, because only the Father knows when it will be.

Share: *When was a time that you were unprepared?*

† READ: Mark 13:33-37

Share: *Why do you think Jesus said these words to his disciples?*

Commentary

In Sunday's gospel we sense the serious urgency in Jesus' voice as he talks to his beloved followers about the future. He will be leaving them for a while, but this does not give them permission to relax and take it easy. They must prepare for his return by continuing to do his work here on earth. In the verses preceding Sunday's gospel, Jesus speaks of the chaos that will descend upon the earth before he returns, but even through those challenging times his faithful followers are encouraged to do his work on this earth and stay watchful and prepared.

Share: *As a follower of Jesus, what is your purpose on earth as you wait for his return?*

Reflection

Now it is our turn to spend time on this earth and wait and prepare for Christ's return. What is expected of us? Advent is a time of preparation. We buy gifts, clean and decorate our homes, and spend time baking and cooking, as we wait for the celebration of the first coming of Christ. But how are we preparing for the second coming of Christ? Do we even think about it? When we are threatened by chaos and challenging times, are we able to find the peace that we are promised by being prepared and living the life we have been called to live?

Share: *What improvements need to be made in the life you are living as you prepare for Christ's return?*

Prayer: May our lives be pleasing to you O Lord, as we prepare for your return. Amen.

The Courage to Wait

† ***Ps. 27:14****—Wait for the Lord; take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!*

Reading this verse for the first time, I was struck by its unusual construction. The command to "wait for the Lord" appears twice, with "take courage" and "be stouthearted" sandwiched in between. I had always envisioned courage and waiting as opposite actions: courage involved faith in a decision or task, while waiting involved doing nothing. However, in this verse, the call for courage is right in the middle of the waiting, as if the action of waiting asks for it.

As a high school senior, I'm starting to understand why. I am waiting on almost everything: college decisions, grades, the last Christmas before leaving home. When asked where I'm going next, I don't have an answer. It takes more courage to sit with that question, this waiting, than I expected.

Psalm 27 ends with this verse, after the psalmist describes his unanswered fears. Yet he still chooses to wait; he trusts that he will see the Lord's goodness. Though my questions may go unanswered for months, this Advent I can wait with courage and, in that waiting, find peace.

—Siddharth Modha, High School Senior

Lord, I pray for the courage to keep waiting and hoping in you. Amen.

With the Faith of Children

† ***Lamentations 3:25****—The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him."*

I don't like this passage...it's that word "wait." If the request is to sit, be quiet and good and get a reward…well, that feels passive and transactional rather than thoughtful, active, and filled with striving.

I spend my days with Kindergartners. Glorious in their curiosity, candor, and energy. They are also driven by striving—the kind that is in the souls of children. The kind that motivates them forward and searches for meaning and love. That is the soul seeking God!

So I balked at "wait." Children cannot wait for the moment when they complete the journey to adulthood. The discomfort of being young, or not having the control over life (as children imagine adults have) is painful to sit with. We cannot wait to leave that discomfort.

In the scripture, what if by "wait for him" we are being asked to allow ourselves to be so fully present...even in our hardest struggles and deepest sorrow, that we begin to feel God as present in us then? We "wait" by allowing ourselves to sit in all moments instead of trying to push away or get to the next. Wait for him (with him) and acknowledge discomfort. While always allowing our "soul to seek him" by striving, growing, and reaching—with the faith of children who remain certain of the parent's presence, love, and goodness.

—Alyssa Biniak

Wait with me, Lord, and help me to grow in you. Amen.

A Reminder

† ***Ps. 85:10-11****—Near indeed is his salvation for those who fear him; steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

Sometimes it seems like God is no longer interested in our lives. We are forgotten. Where is God when our best friend moves away? When a friend loses her job? When there is a car accident or a cancer diagnosis? Why does God remain silent when we feel hurt or betrayed by a friend or even by our church or country?

Our psalmist encourages the people of God to remember God's attentiveness, God's vision and action within our lives. "Justice and peace will kiss. Love and truth will meet."

Maybe what I needed today more than anything else is a reminder of God's goodness, God's faithfulness to God's promises. I remember a shawl draped over shoulders while sitting vigil in the hospital. I remember the phone ringing and a friend asking, "How are you? No, really, how are you?" I remember gatherings with family and friends celebrating milestones, reconciling a broken relationship, and simply enjoying being present to one another. I remember God's promises. God is with us.

—Christi Bohmbach

God, remind me, daily, of your goodness. Amen.

A Bad Dream?

† ***John 16:22****—So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take that joy away from you.*

In August, I fell and broke my hip and sustained other injuries. The pain was indescribable. That night, and for the next days, weeks and months, I received excellent care from medical professionals and my loving husband. In the beginning, I often thought this was a bad dream, not real. During my recovery, I have had to undergo tests and procedures to rule out urinary tract cancer. I needed to wait for test results, and to wait for my broken hip to heal so that I could regain mobility and independence (still a work in progress). I felt joy when no cancer was found! Now I feel joy when I can take a few steps unaided.

These experiences have certainly been an exercise in trusting in the Lord, his timing and his plan for me. I can't imagine the struggle it must have been for the disciples to trust that they would see Jesus again! I thank God for his words in Scripture that allow me to trust and hope, and for his Holy Spirit who inspired those words.

I can't honestly say that I always feel joy right now, but I always feel very blessed!

—Janet Miller

Lord, I place my hope and trust in you. Amen.

Finding Peace in the Unknown

† ***Micah 7:7****—But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.*

This summer, I unexpectedly found out I had a large tumor. I was terrified, especially when doctors told me there was an extremely high chance it was cancer. Suddenly, my life felt completely out of my control, and the uncertainty was overwhelming.

After my biopsy, I anxiously waited for the results. The day before I was supposed to find out whether I had cancer, I was sitting alone in church. I remember sobbing as I prayed to God, begging him for everything to be okay. I felt helpless, but I knew I could turn to him.

The next day, I found out I didn't have cancer. My family and friends were overjoyed, and I felt an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude. To me, it felt like a miracle and a reminder that God had heard my prayers.

Looking back, Micah 7:7 reminds me that faith doesn't mean we won't experience fear or uncertainty. It means turning to God even when we don't know what comes next.

This Advent season, I've learned that peace isn't always the absence of chaos. Sometimes, it's knowing that even in our most frightening moments, we are never alone.

—Lucy Krug, High School Senior

Thank you God, for always being by my side. Amen.

Heirs to the Promise

† ***Isaiah 41:10****—Do not fear for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God.*

Fear is a powerful motivator, and we are constantly encouraged to be afraid, to be very afraid: We are told to fear global warming or runaway inflation, to fear right-wing authoritarianism or democratic socialism; to fear the Russians, or the Chinese, or the aliens in our midst. We are warned to fear deranged shooters in our schools, the addicts and the mentally ill living on our Portland sidewalks or raving in our public transportation.

As I age, I fear loss of my physical and especially my mental abilities; I fear dying.

And yet, as heirs of the promise, God tells us not to fear, a commandment that runs counter to our contemporary culture and our own common sense.

Does this mean that disaster, violence, illness, and death are not real? That somehow our community, our families, ourselves will be sheltered from calamity? Certainly not. As Christian realists, we recognize that the world is a dangerous place, we will suffer, and we will die. It simply means that God will be with us through these all.

—Patrick Geary

Our fears are many. Forgive us, Lord, when we turn away from you. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent

The Discomfort Of Sin, The Joy Of Forgiveness

Introduction

What is causing you discomfort this Advent Season? If we listen to John the Baptist, he is telling us that our discomfort is coming from the sin we are carrying around, and it is time to unload that "baggage" and move forward with joy.

My sixteen-year-old granddaughter belongs to a faith tradition that believes a person should choose when they are ready to be baptized. She chose March 1st of this year. It was a very important day for her. We, her family, and many of her friends, joined her for worship and to witness her baptism. Several weeks later, I asked her if her life had changed now that she was baptized? She thought for a moment and said "yes." She felt a new freedom and strength that she had not experienced before, especially when it came to dealing with troublesome relationships and facing challenging situations.

Take time this Advent to remember that through baptism you are God's adopted child. There needs to be no discomfort in your life, because God is listening and ready to forgive your sins and bless you with a life of freedom and joy.

Share: *What is causing you discomfort this Advent season?*

† READ: Mark 1:1-8

Share: *Imagine you had just spent the day with John the Baptist. How would you explain the experience to your friends and family?*

Commentary

Mark tells us that people of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were going out to see John the Baptist in the desert. I wonder how many of them were educated in the scriptures enough to know that John was the person written about by the prophet Isaiah? How many had heard about him from a friend or family member? How many were just curious and wanted to see him for themselves…this crazy preacher in the desert. It didn't matter what got the people there, what did matter, is what happened to them after they got there.

Share: *Is there anything happening in your life today that has the possibility of changing you?*

Reflection

What useless baggage are you dragging through Advent this year? What in your life is causing you discomfort? Is it a relationship with someone that could be better? It is something in your environment that needs to be straightened up or removed? Maybe it's something personal that needs to be shared with a God that knows and loves you…a God who adopted you at baptism and wants you to remain strong and free and full of joy to celebrate the birth of his Son?

Share: What baggage is weighing you down this Advent?

PRAY: Forgive me Lord, for ignoring your presence in my life. Fill me with joy, Amen.

Mirroring Forgiveness

† ***Ephesians 4:32****—Be kind to one another, compassionate; forgiving one another as God has forgiven you.*

Our contemporary world produces stimuli which create a lot of discomfort. Some of the remedies we adopt to deal with these anxieties and discomforts don't improve the situation. During interactions with friends, family and social media, it is easy to adopt a snarky and unforgiving tone in an effort to make ourselves feel better. The result is often the opposite.

Jesus was always counter-cultural and the Gospels invite us to do the same. Instead of holding grudges and trying to get the better of people whether in person or online, Jesus invites us to take the unconventional path of benevolence, compassion and forgiveness. This path leads us past discomfort to integrity and grace and reflects the forgiveness God has given us all.

—Mary Geary

Lord, keep us walking on your path. Amen.

Trust, Relationship, Faith

† ***Luke 1:46-47****—My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

"Mary may not have felt brave upon receiving word that she would bear the Christ child, but her willingness is heroic nonetheless. She chooses trust over certainty, relationship over control, faith over being able to make sense of it all." —Mary Aloe

As I write this reflection and anticipate the season of Advent I face serious health challenges in 3 family members and 1 friend. I love them and have asked God "Why, how can this be? Where are you?

Mary's question: "How can this be?" echoes within me. And Mary provides the answers—

Trust: Trust God's love for them, for you. Stand strong in your belief that God has not abandoned them or you. God walks with you.

Relationship: Mary went to her cousin, to give and receive love and support. They walk together in the face of mystery. My life is filled with people who are loved by me and who love me. I am not alone.

Faith: In the face of mystery, Mary and Elizabeth opened to the trustworthiness of God no matter what appeared in their lives.

I have experienced that trustworthiness in my life over and over and over again as I lived the mystery of suffering.

—Therese Fenzl

Jesus and Mary, You are my Strength and My Glory! Amen.

The Joy of Being Made New

† ***Romans 15:9****—May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another.*

This past year, our little parish community in Bandon accomplished something remarkable. Together, we built a new church. But looking back, I realize that something even more beautiful was being built: our common humanity, our generosity, our patience, and our capacity to bring out the best in one another.

It reminded me of a simple truth: God created us good. Beneath our imperfections, disagreements, disappointments, and the ever-changing circumstances of life, there remains a goodness that comes from him.

Sin has a way of making us forget that goodness. It divides us, hardens our hearts, and sometimes makes strangers of people who were created to be brothers and sisters. Forgiveness does the opposite. It restores what sin has wounded. It makes room for joy.

Perhaps the deepest joy of Advent is not simply that God comes to dwell among us, but that he comes to restore us to ourselves, to one another, and to him.

As we prepare to welcome Christ, perhaps the question is not simply, "Am I ready for Christmas?" but rather, "What goodness is God trying to rebuild in me?"

—Fr. Anthony

Restore your goodness within me, Lord. Amen.

The Importance of Being Earnest, Revisited

† ***1 Peter 3:17****—It is better to suffer for doing good, if that is the will of God, than for doing evil.*

I imagine Peter an earnest man: strong back, stout shoulders, calloused hands. Ferocious in his effort to master the revolutionary teachings of Jesus that push the boundaries of his cultural traditions as well as his fisherman's upbringing. Which is why this snippet of scripture feels so authentic. The simple—some might say 'obvious'—logic of "better to do good than to do evil" which even then is qualified by that wonderful "if" statement placed midstream. This is a man who understands the bar is set high and yet does not shrink from trying to clear it.

Isn't this our lesson? To acknowledge limitations and persevere anyway? To give and receive comfort along the road, embracing our shared pilgrim soul as we collectively journey to God's love? Persistent if uncertain of the way, earnest in our hospitality despite our suffering. Always ready, as Peter urges in a prior verse, "to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

—Dan O'Brien

Lead me Lord, beyond my limitations. Amen.

Receiving Well

† ***Romans 2:4****—Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

It's difficult to receive good gifts, even from God! That may sound strange- why would it be hard to receive a gift? Truly receiving is an act of surrender, saying yes to the will, timing, and pleasure of another. To receive is to make a gift of oneself. Our Blessed Mother gives us a wonderful example in the Annunciation. She is turned completely toward God, so much so that she can receive God himself in the Incarnation.

However, if our relationship with someone is strained or distant, it's even harder to receive from them. We need to be reconciled before we can truly appreciate what we receive. Even if we have not yet been reconciled, the beauty of the gift, if we are open to it, is that it helps soften our hearts, if we let it.

—Lauren Craig

This Advent, may each of us let the Lord's good gifts of kindness, forbearance, and patience soften our hearts in preparation for the Greatest Gift- our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Discomfort of Sin and the Joy of Forgiveness

† ***Psalm 103:2-3****—Bless the Lord, my soul; and do not forget his gifts, who forgives all your sins and heals all your ills.*

Have you ever been so close to doing something so wrong that even when you didn't do it, you felt you had anyway? I had that happen to me once. I had heard the lessons my whole life as a Catholic that God forgives, but this was outside of all that I knew—or thought I understood. But at a Mass on a rainy Saturday night, sitting in the furthest pew away from the altar that I could find, I was given that gift of forgiveness directly from God and straight to my heart.

I've heard it said that a life flashes by in near-death situations—for me, it was a message delivered with absolute clarity that truly unfolded the meaning of this Psalm. The Lord was going to forgive me, because he was born human, and that as human, I was worthy of a second chance. And a third. And a fourth. Time and time again. He got me—and he gets all of us. That is the gift that will always keep on giving, especially as we wait for his arrival in this and every Advent season.

—Erin Couch

Thank you, Lord, for your endless gift of forgiveness. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent

The Discomfort of Doubt, the Joy of Faith

Introduction

On this third Sunday in Advent, John the Baptist is feeling the discomfort of doubt. The "Big Wigs" from Jerusalem have ventured out into the desert to challenge his identity.

Have you ever had your identity challenged? If you did, you probably pulled out your driver's license or passport, or some other form of photo ID. But, think about it, that photo has very little to do with who you really are. You can look in the mirror, but there you only see your reflection. You can try to explain who you are by the titles you have had or the things you have done. For example: I am a daughter, sister, niece, cousin, aunt, wife, mother, student, teacher, etc. But that only tells the things I have done, not who I am. Friends and loved ones can describe us better than we can describe ourselves.

The only one who truly knows us is our wonderful God, in whose image we have been created. It is not until we finish our time on this earth, that we will know our true identity. As St. Paul reminds us: "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face."

Share: *Who are you?*

† READ: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Share: *What do you think John thought about having his identity challenged?*

Commentary

Even before John the Baptist was conceived, his father, Zachariah knew his identity. He was going to be the prophet about whom Isaiah spoke. He would be the one to prepare the people for the arrival of the promised Messiah. We are told that the Spirit was already in him. He probably grew into adulthood filled with the joy that comes from allowing the Holy Spirit to take control of your life. When the "Big Wigs" from Jerusalem questioned him, he probably had no doubt about his identity even though he couldn't explain it.

Share: *How do you think John felt about his purpose on earth? Did he know his relative, Jesus, was the Messiah?*

Reflection

What can we learn about our own identity from John the Baptist? He knew his purpose on this earth, and he knew who he "was not." We certainly know who we "are not" which can cause us to feel like failures. We set goals to be like someone we admire and fall short of those goals. It is so easy to be filled with doubt and disappointment. Take inventory of your life on this third week of Advent. Ask yourself if you are the person God wants you to be. Rest in the faith that your creator is still working in you and God's plan for you is not yet complete.

Share: *When have you tried to be like someone else and failed?*

Prayer: You are the potter, Lord, we are the clay. Fashion us with your loving care. Amen.

Ready or Not?

† ***Isaiah 64:8****—Yet Lord, you are our father, we are the clay and you our potter; we are the works of your hands.*

It was a dark night and raining when I saw him again on NE Broadway near the Plaid Pantry. I was pretty sure it was the same man I had seen a couple nights ago leaning against the storefront. This time he was sitting on a bench near the bus stop, staring at traffic, his body form mostly submerged under a heap of ragged clothes.

I told myself, "My goal tonight is to get to Les Schwab, then turn around and go home, out of the rain."

Dare I greet this person on the bench? If I do, what will follow? I don't have money with me to give him if he asks.

I could say a silent prayer for him and continue on my walk. Would that be enough?

So easy to mouth the words, "Our Father."

I honestly want to walk away and so far, I have.

—Sr Joan Spiering

Forgive me, Lord, when I let you down. Amen.

Just a Carry-On

† ***1 Thess.5:11****—Therefore encourage one another and build up each other.*

Working for American Airlines gave me insight into how travelers pack. When I asked the passenger who was crossing the globe and returning in two weeks, "How many bags are you checking?" I was initially shocked by, "Just my carry-on, please." Then I learned the pattern: experienced travelers don't pack much.

I think our life journey might be similar and we don't need answers. Initially we believe planning for all contingencies will help us, but experience teaches that we've been distracted by worrying, buried by fears, and stuck in past hurts. Loving each other and God only requires an open heart as our journey unfolds, without knowing what will happen … and maybe leaving the baggage behind.

—Deacon Mike O'Mahoney

Lord, let your love spill from my heart to those who journey with me. Amen.

We are God's Beloved

† ***Genesis 1:27****—God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.*

When God created each of us in his image, there is not a certain "look" he had in mind like the idols of old. Rather he created us to love him and each other as he loves us--unconditionally. As many doubts as we may have about our worthiness in our earthly journey of faith, we must remember that as Dutch Priest Henri Nouwen wrote, God calls each of us, as different as we are, his "beloved". And "Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence."

As His Beloved we are called to serve, accept, and to forgive, just as he supports and forgives us. For those of us in our human bodies, this can seem an impossible task as we encounter challenge after challenge. But if we turn to God and ask him to help us love as he loves, we can find the strength and joy of forgiveness and be the Light to others in the image of God and his Son through the Holy Spirit. As we wait in the anticipation of Advent, may we open our hearts to receive the joy of his love and in turn may that be our gift to others.

—Donna Mason

Lord, may I carry joy to those who travel with me. Amen.

Beyond the Labels and Expectations

† ***Ps. 138:14****—I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know.*

As a senior in high school, one question that comes up perpetually is, "What are you thinking about for college?" I always respond with my short, rehearsed answer: something in California related to business. In reality, I don't really know. With every passing day, I question and reconsider what my next four years might look like.

In the Gospel, the Pharisees and Levites try to understand John the Baptist by fitting his identity into a box. Their attempts fall short; they cannot fully define him. Similarly, our identities and perceptions of ourselves are constantly evolving. We are always trying to become better versions of ourselves while coming to terms with who we are. There is discomfort in sorting through the different parts of our identities as we try to understand ourselves and where we belong.

However, I find comfort in knowing that God is with me through this process. Amid our human struggles and uncertainties, God sees us for who we truly are and knows who we are striving to become. We do not need to have everything figured out or fit neatly into a particular definition. God knows us beyond the labels we give ourselves and the expectations others place upon us. Our very selves he knows.

—Luke Glavan, High School Senior

Thank you, Lord, for knowing me better than I know myself. Amen.

Human Intuition

† ***Ps. 100:3a****—Know that the Lord is God, he made us, we belong to him.*

This psalm helps me remember that it is my responsibility to be authentically myself. In moments of doubt and uncertainty, there is always a voice of intuition to be found within us to guide us back. One of our greatest powers as humans is our ability to intuitively feel and know what is true to ourselves. As the world around us continues to rely more on technology and other sources to tell us what is right and wrong, I have found comfort in knowing that many times the answer lies within myself, but it can take faith to follow that intuition. Today, take a moment to remind yourself of the knowledge and power you hold within yourself. As I am constantly having to remind my students and myself, we are capable of much more than we sometimes believe.

—Grace Manthey, Madeleine School Teacher

I am your creation, God, take me beyond my limitations. Amen.

A New Creation

† ***2 Cor. 5:16****—Whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.*

At my time of life, I know firsthand what it means to begin again. When my marriage ended, it was the end of what I had imagined. Instead, it became the beginning of something unexpectedly wonderful.

I found freedom, independence, and opportunities I never anticipated. A career, making my own choices, discovering strengths I didn't know I possessed...life held more possibility than I ever imagined.

One of my favorite movies is Groundhog Day. Beneath the humor, it is a story of redemption that unfolds gradually, one day at a time. In my own life, healing and renewal came slowly, through small choices, hard lessons, and God's patient grace.

Age and time have also softened me. I have become gentler and more forgiving with myself, and that self-compassion has created room for growth. I no longer see mistakes or endings as failures, but as opportunities to learn and begin again.

Being a new creation means trusting that God is never finished with us. At every age and stage of life, he continues to offer the grace of renewal and the promise of becoming more fully who we were created to be.

—Teresa Nippolt

Refresh me, Lord, as I strive to do your will. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Discomfort and Joy

Introduction

Being pregnant is the perfect example of discomfort and joy. At least that was my experience. Even before I knew I was pregnant, I was getting hit by waves of nausea which sent me running to the nearest bathroom, or in some cases, stopping along the side of the road. I soon got in the habit of never leaving the house without an ample supply of peppermint lozenges, which seemed to calm my stomach. Perhaps that is why my fifty-eight-year-old daughter loves candy canes. Along with the discomfort of nausea came the joy of knowing that a child was growing inside my womb, a child that represented the love that my husband and I had for each other. As the baby within me grew, new aches and pains arrived as my body stretched and adjusted to make room for this growing life. We have no record of the angel Gabriel telling Mary about the discomfort and joy that she would experience, not for just nine months, but for all the rest of her life, once she said "yes" to becoming the mother of God's Son.

Share: *Share a funny or interesting pregnancy story.*

† READ: Luke 1:26-38

Share: *"Nothing will be impossible for God." How do these words fit into your life?*

Commentary

As we begin this final week of Advent, the story of God coming to earth to live among us starts to unfold. God chooses a young girl, a teenager, untarnished by the darkness and challenges of the world and filled with enthusiasm and joy for the future. She is the one who will give God the humanity that enables him to become one of us, to experience our discomforts and our joys. he will buy us the freedom to escape this world and know the everlasting joy of eternal life.

Share: *At what point do you think Mary realizes what she has done by saying "yes" to the angel Gabriel's request?*

Reflection

Mary accepts the challenge to change her life and become the mother of God's son without any idea of the discomfort and joy she would experience for the rest of her life. Think about your life and the times you have been "nudged" out of your comfort zone to try something new. What was the result of that change? Did you grow in confidence? Did you discover new things about yourself? Did you grow into a closer relationship with God? One of my favorite quotes is: "Man's heart makes plans, but God chooses the way."

Share: *Has God ever stepped in and changed your plans?*

Prayer: Walk with us Lord through the discomforts and joys of this life. Amen.

Watching for the Dawn

† ***Luke 1:78-79****—Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet to the way of peace.*

Today is Winter Solstice. For a number of years now I have gone up on Rocky Butte to meet friends and watch for the Winter Solstice dawn. Some years it is cold and clear, other years pouring rain. Sometimes the way is shrouded in thick fog. Always it is dark when I begin the journey, with the deep darkness of the longest night of the year. When I find my friends we light candles. Like the people of Israel in the darkness of Roman occupation, we bring our own experiences of darkness and the shadow of death, anticipating the light. And every year, whatever the weather, the light breaks through the darkness and dawn comes. Suddenly the world becomes bright again, and the shadows are dispelled. Creation is renewed! We break into song, filled with the joy of life. May the Light break into all our lives this Advent!

—Frodo Okulam

May your light and joy, O Lord, break forth into our world this Christmas. Amen.

Hope is a Choice, Every Day

† ***Romans 15:13****—May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.*

As someone who has given my life to education and creating spaces of inclusive learning for nearly 30 years, I have had to develop a deep, unwavering relationship with hope. Watching a child learn to read, to use their bravest voice to speak or sing at Mass, or to ask a new friend to play at recess can literally take your breath away.

I see God at work a thousand times a day in the lives of our children, if I remember to look. You always find what you look for and what you pay attention to, grows. As a fellow educator once said, "Teaching is ultimately an act of hope. Every time I teach a lesson, I hope it will inspire learning. Every time I intervene with a struggling student, I hope it will change the trajectory of their path. The temptation to fall into cynicism is alive and well in education. However, hope is a choice I make every day."

Just as Mary and Joseph did, educators accept the call, endure the hard days, and embrace the beautiful struggle as it is to raise our young people into who they are called to be. Educators show up every day hope-filled and ready to love and support each child, even when it seems a challenge beyond what any one person can do.

—Dr. Kate Woicke
Principal, The Madeleine School

May we all choose hope and joy this season, but make sure to have a band-aid ready too ;)

God's Light Shines

† ***Isaiah 9:1-2****—The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy.*

As Advent draws to a close, Isaiah's words take on special meaning. He speaks of a people walking in darkness who are suddenly greeted by a great light. That light is the promise of God's presence, a promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ. At Christmas, God enters our world not with power or riches, but as a child, bringing hope, peace, and joy.

Our Advent journey has reminded us that waiting can bring discomfort. We all carry different burdens, worries, and uncertainties. Yet Christmas reminds us that darkness does not have the final word. God's light shines even in the midst of our struggles.

As a parish community, we are called not only to welcome Christ but to share his light with others. This Christmas, let us reach out to someone who is lonely, offer forgiveness where there is hurt, and extend kindness to those who need encouragement. In doing so, we become the light of Christ for one another.

—Fr. Mike Biewend

Loving God, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son, fill our hearts with his light. Turn our discomfort into hope, our worries into trust, and our waiting into joy. Bless our parish family, especially those who are lonely, grieving, or struggling. May we welcome Christ with open hearts and carry his light into the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Those Who Sing, Pray Twice

† ***Psalm 100:1-2****—Shout joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful song.*

My first exposure to joyful song was when I was a young child, being carried in my father's arms to worship on Sunday mornings. The service began with the majestic notes of the pipe organ, then the people all around me stood up and began to sing, often in four-part harmony. Soon the parade came down the aisle, led by a young boy carrying the cross and a fifty-voice choir dressed in beautiful robes. It was a glorious moment to my young eyes and ears.

Although I was too young to understand what was happening, I knew it was something very special that made everyone happy and joyful. Perhaps that is why I have sung in a church choir all of my life. The saying is "those who sing, pray twice.

This blessed Christmas Eve, let your voices sing with joy to God's only Son who has come to set his beloved children free.

—Marilyn Robb

All glory, honor and praise be yours, O Holy Child of Bethlehem. Amen.

Embrace the Uncomfortable

† ***Luke 2:10****—The angel said to them 'Do not be afraid; for behold I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today is born for you a Savior.'*

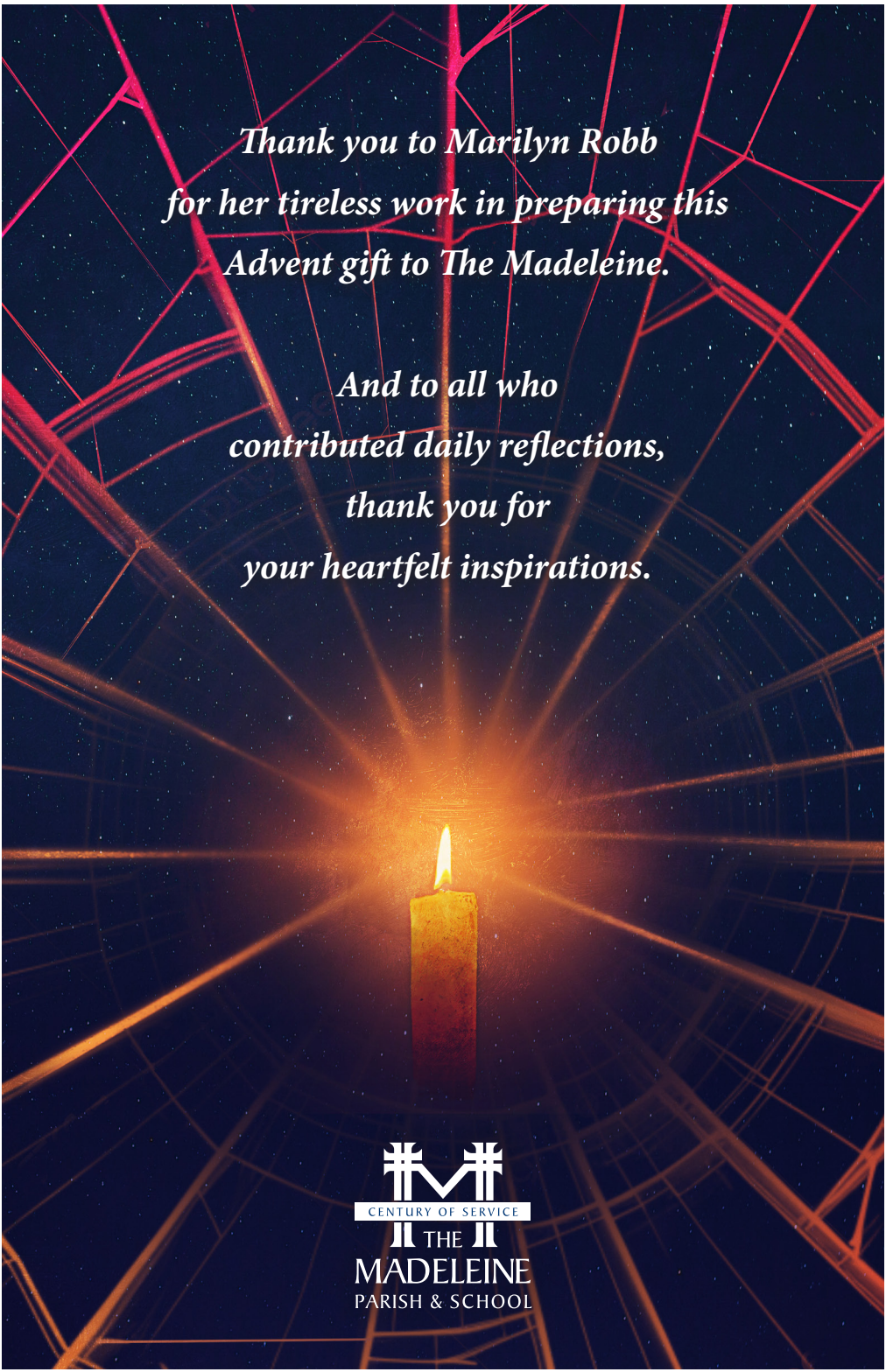
The provocative theme "Discomfort and Joy" is appropriate for reflection on the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus! The discomfort of childbearing is clear to anyone having given birth or journeyed with them through delivery. From my point of view, how wonderful it is to watch the discomfort fade into so much more Joy! Beyond delivery, when a child is welcomed into the family, the newborn child's presence is an invitation for every family member to make space for the child, yielding physical and emotional space, time, and sometimes sleep.

As the child grows, they often propose new points of view, and families are invited to embrace these points of view in love. These changes can be uncomfortable and sometimes even resisted. But when embraced, any child enriches our lives and proves to be a source of profound joy! This includes Mary and Joseph. Today, each of us is invited to embrace a newborn child or to newly embrace this child born to Mary and Joseph. His first public words to the world will be "Repent and believe in the Gospel," and the perspectives he brings, often uncomfortable, when embraced will be a source of joy for all people!

—Fr. Bonaventure Rummell

Holy Child of Bethlehem, may you ever be our source of joy. Amen.

Faith Sharing Notes


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CENTURY OF SERVICE
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