

# *Sioux Falls Seminary*

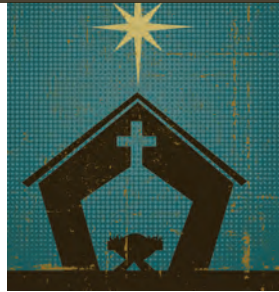
2100 S. Summit Avenue . Sioux Falls, SD 57105  
800.440.6227 . [info@sfseminary.edu](mailto:info@sfseminary.edu)  
[www.sfseminary.edu](http://www.sfseminary.edu)



## *Devotional Thoughts*

**the season of advent 2011**

Compliments of Sioux Falls Seminary . 2100 S. Summit Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57105



## About the devotional authors

We are pleased to share with you five advent devotionals written by alumni of Sioux Falls Seminary. The devotionals—one for each week of Advent plus Christmas day—are based on lectionary texts for the week.

### **Week One: November 27, 2011**

**Wayne Jorstad**, Master of Divinity, 1983, is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Wetaskiwin, Alberta.

### **Week Two: December 4, 2011**

**Andrew Bartel**, Master of Divinity, 2010, is the director of the Wesley Acres Camp and Retreat Center in Dazey, North Dakota.

### **Week Three: December 11, 2011**

**Carol Potratz**, Master of Arts in Christian Education, 1978, serves for the North American Baptist Conference as a missionary to Japan in the area of discipleship and evangelism.

### **Week Four: December 18, 2011**

**Randy Rasmussen**, Master of Divinity, 2002, is the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He also serves as an adjunct instructor at Sioux Falls Seminary in the area of supervised ministry.

### **Christmas Day: December 25, 2011**

**Dennis Dewey**, Master of Divinity, 1976 & Doctor of Ministry, 2005, is the senior pastor of Hope Fellowship Church in Kansas City, Missouri.

December 25, 2011

Dennis Dewey

## *The Wonder of Christmas*

**Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97, Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20**

Luke 2 includes a whirlwind of activity. Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Jesus is born—God became man, wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger. An angel appears to shepherds announcing the good news of the birth of a Savior. The shepherds leave their flock and find Mary, Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. And when the dust settled, Mary treasured and pondered (verse 19), and the shepherds glorified and praised God and spread the word (verses 17, 20).

Christmas Day will likely be a busy day for you—maybe even a whirlwind of activity. But right now, you've found a quiet spot. Perhaps the activity has yet to start, or maybe the dust of the whirlwind has begun to settle. In either case, take time to follow the lead of Mary and the shepherds.

Think deeply . . . ponder what God has done . . . what treasures are ours because of Christmas. Marvel at how he left heaven and became one of us. Try to fathom the depth of his love that caused a Savior to come . . . knowing it would lead him to the cross. Embrace the privilege of being one of God's children because he sent his child.

Take time to glorify and praise God for the marvelous gift of our Savior. Get on your knees, humble yourself before God, and exalt him. Worship him with your whole heart, and tell him you love him.

Then, remember to spread the word. In the days ahead when people ask, "How was your Christmas?" take advantage of that opportunity. You don't have to preach a sermon. It's okay to talk about presents, and food, and family, and the other good things you enjoyed. But talk about how Christmas was for you spiritually, too. Perhaps you can share a few words about how and why you praised God and about the things you pondered in your heart. That way, when the activity ends and the dust settles, the message of what God has done through Christmas will not have gathered dust . . . you will have spread the word.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help me to be quiet enough to ponder the wonder of Christmas. And help me not to be quiet in the coming days when I have a chance to spread the news and talk about what you have done in sending a Savior. Amen.

December 18, 2011

Randy Rasmussen

# The Bigger Picture

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38**

In 2 Samuel 7:1-16, we find King David and Nathan (the prophet) relaxing and talking in the palace. David has a wonderful idea to honor God by building him a beautiful temple, and Nathan supports the plan. Later that night, God speaks to Nathan and basically says, “Did I ask for a temple?”

What’s up with this response? At first glance, it seems like God is a spoil sport, not wanting to accept a good gift because it was not his idea. But as God continues in his revelation to Nathan, he reaffirms David’s unique calling to unify the nation of Israel and defeat their enemies. God also goes on to give David an inconceivable promise, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (verse 16).

Of course, God’s promise to David is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of David. Although David’s desire to honor God with a temple was good, his vision inclined toward the temporal. David had yet to fully understand his part in God’s **eternal** plan of salvation for the world.

We also get so preoccupied with the temporal that we miss the “bigger picture” of our part in God’s eternal plan of salvation. In Billy Graham’s daily newspaper column, *My Answer*, a reader questioned the purpose of a tragic event in her life. As a part of Graham’s answer, he reminded the reader that God not only shapes our souls for this life, but that he also shapes our souls for eternity. While our vision may be short-sighted, God is always working out “the bigger picture.”

**Prayer:** Our Father in Heaven, during this season of Advent, help us to not only celebrate the historic first coming of Christ, but also your ongoing promise to redeem the world through Jesus Christ. Amen.

November 27, 2011

Wayne Jorstad

# Restore Us, O God

**Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37**

In the city where I reside there is a well-known museum that many come to visit. It houses an enormous collection of beautifully-restored antique cars. One of my favorite exhibits is near the main entrance. It shows half of an antique car in the condition it was found—rusty, dirty and dented. The other half shows the car in its new condition—beautifully restored. What a contrast! It always amazes me how something old and ugly can be restored and transformed into something everybody wishes they could take home.



Psalm 80:1-7 reminds us that God is our Shepherd who can restore us and bring us into a right relationship again. Many of us make sinful choices that can make us feel battered and beaten up. As a result, we feel guilty and God seems far away.

Be encouraged. Christmas proclaims the truth of the extent to which God went to provide salvation and restore us so that we can experience the spiritual riches found in Jesus Christ. God can and will restore us to a point where our salvation seems fresh and meaningful once again. The theme “restore” is often found on the lips of God’s people.

Lamentations 5:21, “Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old . . .”

Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

Psalm 71:20, “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.”

Perhaps we should pray a simple prayer as the Psalmist recorded, “Restore us, O God make your face shine upon us . . .”

**Prayer:** God, we come before you today recognizing that we have made choices that have affected our relationship with you and perhaps with others. Restore us, O God, make your face shine upon us. Enable us to walk in the steps of the spirit so we may walk in the light of your presence. Amen.

December 4, 2011

Andrew Bartel

## *The Waiting*

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

I'm a child of the 1980's. Every year at Advent, I'm reminded of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers singing, "The **waiting** is the hardest part." Yet, that is exactly what we are called to do at Advent—**WAIT**. We are bombarded by Christmas music in the stores and, perhaps, even pressured by parishioners to hurry, to put away the Advent carols, to stop waiting, and to begin singing the Christmas hymns, now! We **wait** in line to spend more money on more things for more people who already have all that they need while others **wait** for their next meal or clean drink of water, not knowing when or if it will appear. We do not like to **wait**.

Just as the world had to **wait** for the Incarnation, so now we must **wait** for the return of Jesus. Just as the world had to **wait** for the Kingdom to come, so now we must **wait** for it to come in its fullness. This holy season of Advent is a time of **waiting**, a time of discipleship, a time of preparing and training us for the **waiting** that still lies before us.

And the Psalmist reminds us of that promised day for which we **wait**: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky" (Psalm 85:10-11).

The echoes of Psalm 85 are unmistakably reverberant in John's revelation, too. The day is surely coming when God will bring to fruition his saving plans for all of creation. The new heaven and the new earth shall be one, meeting in a kiss from our grace-empowered faithfulness and God's almighty righteousness.

Let us join together, as the body of Christ, as we **wait** for the day to arrive when we remember the birth of a tiny, helpless child, and let us join together as we anticipate and **wait** for the day when he returns.

**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.

Prayer taken from: *Book of Common Prayer, Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent.*

December 11, 2011

Carol Potratz

## *Joy... Proclamation*

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe . . . He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light . . . 'Who are you? Give us an answer . . . ' John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (John 1:6-8, 22-3).

Today is the third Sunday of Advent . . . a time of JOY through proclamation. The first candle brought us "the light of hope" . . . the second, "the light of peace."

Your voice calls out, "Make straight the way for the Lord." In the lonely places, the wilderness, where we stand forlorn, windswept, and alone.

Your voice calls out, "Make straight the way for the Lord." In the dark places, the shadows, where we hide our fears and embrace our tears.

I'm writing this from Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun. The rising sun comes to us, and you, each dawn. It shines upon those who live in darkness so that all might know the joy of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and God's great mercy.

Unfortunately, those around me miss the fullness of this light. Like John the Baptist, the spirit of the Lord is on me, and he has sent me to reflect this light. How about you? Shouldn't we all reflect his light: as good news to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, service to customers, tolerance to opponents, forgiveness to enemies, charity to all?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, guide our feet. Take us to places where **you** would go . . . give us words that **you** would use. In this Advent season of promise and preparation, may we, like John the Baptist, point the way to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Amen.