

THIS TRANSFORMING  
CYCLE B **WORD**

Commentary on the Readings for Sundays and Feast Days  
of Cycle B of the Lectionary through 2024,  
including full Scripture passages from  
**The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition**  
by Eugene Peterson and William Griffin

ALICE CAMILLE

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## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

### **Alice Camille is a true treasure of the Catholic Church in the United States:**

a woman who can make the Scriptures come alive in new and exciting ways; a serious student of the Bible who understands how to use it effectively in catechesis and religious education; a lay person who tries to live out the kingdom of God in her daily life. Camille has been reflecting on the meaning of the Bible for committed Catholics for many years and was instrumental in reviewing the translation of the additional writings for *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*. So, when ACTA Publications wanted to produce a new series of three books containing reflections on the readings for each of the Sundays and Feast Days of Cycles A, B, and C and include the translation of those readings from *The Message*, Alice Camille was our first (and only) choice.

First, a word about *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. Many Catholics and others have never heard of it, even though it has sold over 16 million copies in various editions. It is a compelling, fresh, challenging, and faith-filled translation of the Bible from the original languages into contemporary, idiomatic American English. Eugene Peterson is a Presbyterian minister, pastor, writer, speaker, poet, Bible scholar and translator. He specializes in what is called “paraphrasal” translation, which tries to reproduce the spirit of the original text rather than provide a literal translation of the words. Rev. Peterson did not include the additional writings of what some Jews and Protestants call the Apocrypha, and Catholics and others call the Deuterocanonical books in the original version of *The Message*. Instead he recruited his friend and colleague, William Griffin, to translate these works in his same style. Griffin, a Catholic layman, writer, and translator, took his text from the *Nova Vulgata*, the revised and expanded version of the original Latin Vulgate that was approved for use by Catholics by Pope John Paul II in 1998. These additions were added to *The Message* in the biblical order expected by Catholics and published in 2013 as *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*.

You may find the Scripture passages in this book jarring at first. Certainly, you will not hear this translation read at Mass. But they might provide new insights into overly familiar texts and help you think again about what they might have to say to people today—especially when accompanied by Camille’s accessible yet erudite reflections.

We encourage you to try *This Transforming Word* for your own prayer and spiritual discernment as you prepare to preach (if you are the homilist) or listen (if you are a congregant) or discuss (if you belong to a small intentional group or community). Included in this book for Cycle B are the Sunday and Feast Day readings for

the years 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2024. Separate books are available for Cycle A in 2017, 2020, and 2023, and for Cycle C in 2016, 2019, and 2022. If you would like to receive the complete readings for each Sunday from *The Message* at no charge, simply go to [www.CatholicEcumenicalMessage.com](http://www.CatholicEcumenicalMessage.com) and sign up to receive them by email.

To purchase a copy of *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition* by Eugene Peterson and William Griffin or books by Alice Camille, including *Invitation to Catholicism*, *Invitation to the Old and New Testament*, *Isaiah and the Kingdom of God*, *The Forgiveness Book*, *The Rosary*, and *Seven Last Words*, go to any seller of books or visit [www.actapublications.com](http://www.actapublications.com). If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at [gpierce@actapublications.com](mailto:gpierce@actapublications.com).

Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
President and Co-Publisher  
ACTA Publications  
Chicago, Illinois

**Note on translating the name of God.** In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the generic name for divinity used by both Israel and its neighbors is translated God (or god). But the unique and distinctively personal name for God that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14) Rev. Peterson has translated as "God" in *The Message*.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Use words truly and well. Don’t stoop to cheap whining.  
Then, but only then, you’ll speak for me.  
Let your words change them.  
Don’t change your words to suit them.”*  
*Jeremiah 15:19*

**Words, words, words.** The world is choked with them, as Hamlet wearily lamented. But most of them don’t amount to much. Thomas Merton agreed. After a short trip beyond the silence of his cloister at Gethsemani Abbey, Merton observed: “There is so much talking that goes on that is utterly useless.”

We talk, text, and e-mail. Media shouts from every corner of the room and each bend in the road. Yet in the barrage of advertising and so-called reporting, little is actually communicated. “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here.” That sentence, from Abraham Lincoln, is a rare exception in a sea of forgettable phrases. What you and I say today will not only quickly disappear. It’s a wonder if anyone hears us in the first place.

There is a cure for the endless, mindless, meaningless rant. Out of the silence, up from the deep, down from the heavens comes a transforming word that changes hearts—and *that* changes everything. This word transfigures because of its own remarkable metamorphosis: from cosmic eternal word to earthbound mortal flesh. This word shatters the barriers of time and needed to be spoken only once. Now it lives and moves and has being in those who hear it and reply.

This book is for those who are listening and hope to respond. Each Sunday and feast of the church year, the transforming word echoes its challenge. We hear it through stories of patriarchs and matriarchs who dare to embark in new directions trailing an untested divinity. It shouts in the oracles of wild prophets madly in love with an unlikely future. It sings in psalms and canticles. It beckons in Lady Wisdom. It invites us to come and see in gospels, and to repent and believe in letters of instruction. Creation testifies to it. Apocalypse mystically reveals it. And all the while this longing word is calling through the centuries, eternity waits in hushed silence for the freely rendered human response. Yours. Mine. Everybody’s.



# ADVENT

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

..... Like Leaves in the Wind

### FIRST READING » ISAIAH 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

*But you're our living Father,  
our Redeemer, famous from eternity!  
Why, GOD, did you make us wander from your ways?  
Why did you make us cold and stubborn  
so that we no longer worshiped you in awe?  
Turn back for the sake of your servants.  
You own us! We belong to you!*

*Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend,  
make the mountains shudder at your presence—  
You did terrible things we never expected,  
descended and made the mountains shudder at your presence.  
Since before time began  
no one has ever imagined,  
No ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you  
who works for those who wait for him.  
You meet those who happily do what is right,  
who keep a good memory of the way you work.  
But how angry you've been with us!  
We've sinned and kept at it so long!  
Is there any hope for us? Can we be saved?  
We're all sin-infected, sin-contaminated.  
Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.  
We dry up like autumn leaves—  
sin-dried, we're blown off by the wind.  
No one prays to you  
or makes the effort to reach out to you  
Because you've turned away from us,  
left us to stew in our sins.*

*Still, GOD, you are our Father.  
We're the clay and you're our potter:  
All of us are what you made us.*

**Have you ever wronged someone who deserved your love?** Have you ever, out of laziness or selfishness, betrayed a good friend? Such acts carry with them a sickening feeling in the stomach, a real knowledge that we're choosing sin. Yet wronging

our parents, loved ones, or friends, is an experience we know too well. In the same way, we wrong the One who made us and gave us all we have. Isaiah expresses with great anguish the result of that choice. Like withered leaves, our guilt bears us away from the God-inspired life we were born for.

Sin is isolating. Consider how quickly anger, self-righteousness, unforgiveness, pride, greed, make you feel alone in the world. In the circle of sin, walls are erected around our hearts, and we experience that “hardened” self that was Pharaoh’s undoing in his encounter with Moses. We experience God as being distant and withdrawn, as in Isaiah’s lament. Sin necessarily hardens us away from the possibility of love and relationship. Yet when we allow grace in, the barriers of sin tumble down and relationship with God and others is restored. We find that God is always near, awaiting the movement of our hearts back toward love. But even the breath of the Holy Spirit won’t blow us back to the tree without our consent.

**How have you been isolated by sin in your relationships?  
What did it take to return to love?**

## SECOND READING » 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

*May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father, and the Master, Jesus Christ, be yours.*

*Every time I think of you—and I think of you often!—I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus. There’s no end to what has happened in you—it’s beyond speech, beyond knowledge. The evidence of Christ has been clearly verified in your lives.*

*Just think—you don’t need a thing, you’ve got it all! All God’s gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale. And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus. God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that.*

**A friend of mine is very ill.** In the last few months he’s been putting his spiritual household in order, as I sit like a midwife by his bed. While waiting to give birth to his life in eternity, we talk about what we love. Mostly, we talk about God and the church.

“The Holy Spirit is the most powerful force in the world!” he declared. “Yet we talk as if the Spirit is Casper the Friendly Ghost—nice, but not real.” I wondered if calling this Divine One the “Holy Ghost” for generations made it easier to dismiss “It” as a shadow.

My friend continued, “But what if the Spirit burned through the church like a Holy Forest Fire, catching hold of us without consuming us? What would that be like?”

Like my friend, Saint Paul imagines a church abundant with spiritual gifts, on fire with generous service, inspired teaching, fervent prayer, charismatic leadership. The



original Corinthian converts burned with zeal for the gospel and the Spirit, and in every generation since, the church produces handfuls of people who do the same. We call them saints; but what if we all took the Holy Spirit seriously? The idea of what the church could be haunts me. Maybe that's the real purpose of the "Holy Ghost": to haunt us into being the people God dreams we could be.

**What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life?  
How is the Spirit expressed in the life of your parish?**

## **GOSPEL » MARK 13:33-37**

*"So keep a sharp lookout, for you don't know the timetable. It's like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So, stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don't want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I'm saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch."*

**I've known several people in the last three years who were told by their doctors they were terminally ill.** In each case, these folks immediately made decisions about their lives that they'd been delaying until now. People who know they're dying can't afford to save anything until later. There may not be a "later." There's only now.

The rest of us are kidding ourselves if we think we're not dying: not now, not any time soon, maybe never. When Jesus says "Be watchful!", we think he means the other guy. We put our faith squarely in "later." Some of us belong to the Church of Later, in which we fully intend to be good, spiritual, faithful people—at a future time to be announced.

Some of us may live to a satisfying old age and wear out with a smile. Some of us will get a deadline from our doctors and have some lead time to prepare. Many of us are left in the dark as to when we'll die or how. This can make us sloppy about the way we live, even arrogant about it. Not taking death seriously is a real mistake in the spiritual life. The church's wisdom is to remind us, right from the start of the church year, that mortality is just what it says it is: a short-term proposition.

**What are the lessons that death teaches you?**

## **WE RESPOND**

Resolve to live this Advent season with watchfulness and attention. Miss no opportunity to be kind, generous, forgiving. Resist spiritual laziness with its shrug toward "later." Be a saint in the making right now.

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

..... Comfort

### FIRST READING » ISAIAH 40:1-5, 9-11

*“Comfort, oh comfort my people,”  
says your God.  
“Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem,  
but also make it very clear  
That she has served her sentence,  
that her sin is taken care of—forgiven!  
She’s been punished enough and more than enough,  
and now it’s over and done with.”*

*Thunder in the desert!  
“Prepare for GOD’s arrival!  
Make the road straight and smooth,  
a highway fit for our God.  
Fill in the valleys,  
level off the hills,  
Smooth out the ruts,  
clear out the rocks.  
Then GOD’s bright glory will shine  
and everyone will see it.  
Yes. Just as GOD has said.”*

*Climb a high mountain, Zion.  
You’re the preacher of good news.  
Raise your voice. Make it good and loud, Jerusalem.  
You’re the preacher of good news.  
Speak loud and clear. Don’t be timid!  
Tell the cities of Judah,  
“Look! Your God!”  
Look at him! GOD, the Master, comes in power,  
ready to go into action.  
He is going to pay back his enemies  
and reward those who have loved him.  
Like a shepherd, he will care for his flock,  
gathering the lambs in his arms,  
Hugging them as he carries them,  
leading the nursing ewes to good pasture.*

**Comfort is a good word.** Recently I sat with a friend and cried, then put my head on his shoulder and felt better, even in my distress. Having a shoulder to cry on is

more than a metaphor; it can be a source of real comfort. Someone is there for you. Someone cares; and already the healing begins.

At the end of the year, a lot of us are in need of a little comfort. The holiday season makes loneliness worse for many, and the absence of loved ones who've died or gone away can feel insurmountable. Expectations are high and emotions sharper in these weeks as social events pile up and money gets tighter. 'Tis the season to be jolly? Well, sure. But tell that to the shepherds shivering in the moonlight before the angels arrive; to wandering wise men far from home; to the teenage girl expecting a baby who's not yet married; or to the man betrothed to a girl who's turning out to be a much more complicated person than he anticipated.

On the edge of a mystery, the night seems endless. But comfort is coming. Advent prophecies are a shoulder to lean on as we enter into winter darkness. On the Advent highway, every valley rises to meet us, and every mountain genuflects for the One who's on his way.

**What are the valleys and mountains you face this Advent season?**

## SECOND READING » 2 PETER 3:8-14

*Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change.*

*But when the Day of God's Judgment does come, it will be unannounced, like a thief. The sky will collapse with a thunderous bang, everything disintegrating in a huge conflagration, earth and all its works exposed to the scrutiny of Judgment.*

*Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day—but we'll hardly notice. We'll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.*

*So, my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace.*

**"What's the worst thing about getting older?"** I asked a holy man who was be-moaning an upcoming birthday. "Not getting more done before I got this old," he admitted.

What was left undone, I wondered? This man worked hard and mastered several trades: was a musician, wood carver, poet; spoke many languages and traveled extensively. He served the community well and with humility. He touched countless lives, and many today bless his name in gratitude. What else was there to do?

"I could have loved more," he confessed.

As we approach the birthday of the Lord, this is the only standard we need to meet. Maybe we'll get all the gifts wrapped on time and a wreath hung at every

window—or maybe not. But as heavens and earth pass away, these things are only important for a moment. What’s more lasting is the love we give away and the love that returns to us. We can’t afford to miss a single opportunity for love. In the end, it’s all that we are.

**“Let me count the ways.”  
How many opportunities to love have you had today?  
How many did you fulfill?**

## **GOSPEL » MARK 1:1-8**

*The good news of Jesus Christ—the Message!—begins here, following to the letter the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.*

*Watch closely: I’m sending my preacher ahead of you;  
He’ll make the road smooth for you.  
Thunder in the desert!  
Prepare for God’s arrival!  
Make the road smooth and straight!*

*John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.*

*As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.”*

**“There’s good news, and there’s bad news.”** A whole body of jokes begins this way, and we laugh ruefully because that statement is generally true. The news is hardly ever good or bad, but rather an amalgam of results better for some than for others. One ball team beats another; is this good news, or bad?

John the Baptist preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Good news or bad? It’s great news for sinners who repent. It’s good news for people who yearn to be forgiven and know they have reason to be. It’s not so good for people who have no intention of leaving their sin behind. And it’s positively bad news for the self-righteous, convinced of their innocence and resentful that sinful types are getting off the hook.

The message of John the Baptism is comfort with a catch. The catch is baptism, a drowning to the old way and a resurrection into gasping new life. We can’t find comfort in religion—not this religion!—if we intend to remain just as we are. John’s baptism is with water, bracing and cold. The Mighty One is coming along soon with fire and Spirit. Things are going to change.

How does the message of John comfort you?  
How does it challenge you?

## WE RESPOND

Give a little comfort this season. Listen to someone who has a story to tell. Include the lonely at your table. Remember the poor.

*“His baptism will change you  
from the inside out.”*

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

..... Desert Voices

### FIRST READING » ISAIAH 61:1-2a, 10-11

*The Spirit of GOD, the Master, is on me  
because GOD anointed me.  
He sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
heal the heartbroken,  
Announce freedom to all captives,  
pardon all prisoners.  
GOD sent me to announce the year of his grace—  
a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies.  
I will sing for joy in GOD,  
explode in praise from deep in my soul!  
He dressed me up in a suit of salvation,  
he outfitted me in a robe of righteousness,  
As a bridegroom who puts on a tuxedo  
and a bride a jeweled tiara.  
For as the earth bursts with spring wildflowers,  
and as a garden cascades with blossoms,  
So the Master, GOD, brings righteousness into full bloom  
and puts praise on display before the nations.*

**Isaiah was a prophet—or likely, a series of prophets embracing one school of thought—who challenged the current of public sentiment around the generations of Israel's exile.** For the most part, that's what prophets do: go *against* the flow. When Israel was haughty, Isaiah preached her downfall. When the nation was in disgrace, the prophet spoke words of courage and comfort. The prophetic voice is generally solitary. Power may normally reside in numbers, but one is a powerful number if the Lord is behind you.

Prophets are desert people, honed in silence and solitude even if they live and work in urban contexts. They separate from mainstream culture and advantage to avoid being bought by them. It's hard to bite the hand that feeds you—and prophets need to be free to bite. Elijah was fed by ravens in the desert to remain beholden to God alone. John the Baptist did time in the wilderness, as did Jesus, to stay focused on God's message. Prophets retreat to the wilderness for more practical reasons too, like personal safety. Healing and freedom is easy to announce to prisoners and the poor—and dangerous to say to their oppressors. It may be more restful to sleep with snakes and scorpions than risk awakening to your enemies.

**Does your lifestyle challenge the voice of our culture?  
How much have you been bought by secular values?**

## SECOND READING » 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

*Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.*

*Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.*

*May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!*

**My father talked of moving from Pennsylvania to Texas when I was fourteen, and I almost had a heart attack.** Not a thing wrong with Texas. It was the idea of change that froze me. New friends, a new high school, starting from scratch: was the man CRAZY? Thank goodness, Dad came to his senses and left my burgeoning social life alone. A close call!

Change is easier on some than on others, but most of us like to be in charge of those changes as much as possible. Trouble is, the big changes that come our way—being born, getting sick, getting old, dying—are out of our hands. But one kind of change is squarely in our control: the conversion of our hearts. We can't be transformed without an act of will.

The Spirit comes knocking, in wind and fire, water and word. Prophecies are spoken and enacted for our benefit, but we can close the door; claim that we gave at the church. You and I don't HAVE to change, ever. We can stay just as we are till the day we die, stubbornly sure of our perfection or cozy with our imperfection. But how sad it would be if we didn't learn more about love than we know today. If we never drew more closely to God than we are right now.

**How are you different now from whom you were a year ago?  
How would you like to be different a year from now?**

## GOSPEL » JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

*There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.*

*When Jews from Jerusalem sent a group of priests and officials to ask John who he was, he was completely honest. He didn't evade the question. He told the plain truth: "I am not the Messiah."*

*They pressed him, "Who, then? Elijah?"*

*"I am not."*

*"The Prophet?"*

*"No."*

*Exasperated, they said, "Who, then? We need an answer for those who sent*

*us. Tell us something—anything!—about yourself.”*

*“I’m thunder in the desert: ‘Make the road straight for God!’ I’m doing what the prophet Isaiah preached.”*

*Those sent to question him were from the Pharisee party. Now they had a question of their own: “If you’re neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?”*

*John answered, “I only baptize using water. A person you don’t recognize has taken his stand in your midst. He comes after me, but he is not in second place to me. I’m not even worthy to hold his coat for him.”*

*These conversations took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing at the time.*

**The people around John are odd.** What seems to attract them is who he is not: not the anointed savior of Israel, not Elijah come to announce the end of the world, not the great prophet the Samaritans were expecting. But the evangelist John also tells us who the Baptist is: the testimony to the great light to follow.

What is your life’s testimony? Does it proclaim fidelity, honesty, generosity? If you had to name ten things you stand for, would any of them be holy? These are hard questions. If I pose them to myself, my answer is wishy-washy: depends on when you ask. Some days are less exemplary than others. Sometimes I’m a shining example of Christian virtue, and I wish my Mom were here to see me. Other times I’m grateful she isn’t and wish no one was. John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus and the fruit of a miracle birth, may have had a head start on his testimony. Or maybe he had to work out all the bugs like the rest of us in the years before he turned up at the Jordan.

But the truth is: whatever our origins, they can’t be an excuse for who we are or are not, “what we’ve done, or failed to do.” John’s desert voice summons me to train mine, to learn to present another clear testimony to the light.

**Describe one element of your Christian witness that is particularly strong.  
What element of your witness needs work?**

## **WE RESPOND**

How do you refine your “desert voice,” your independence from the temptations of a secular worldview? Consider a time of retreat, an afternoon of recollection, or a regular practice of prayer and meditation to keep you “in the desert.”



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

..... A Place for God to Live

### FIRST READING » 2 SAMUEL 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

*Before long, the king made himself at home and GOD gave him peace from all his enemies. Then one day King David said to Nathan the prophet, “Look at this: Here I am, comfortable in a luxurious house of cedar, and the Chest of God sits in a plain tent.”*

*Nathan told the king, “Whatever is on your heart, go and do it. God is with you.”*

*But that night, the word of GOD came to Nathan saying, “Go and tell my servant David: This is GOD’s word on the matter: You’re going to build a ‘house’ for me to live in?”*

*“I took you from the pasture, tagging along after sheep, and made you prince over my people Israel. I was with you everywhere you went and mowed your enemies down before you. Now I’m making you famous, to be ranked with the great names on earth. And I’m going to set aside a place for my people Israel and plant them there so they’ll have their own home and not be knocked around any more. Nor will evil men afflict you as they always have, even during the days I set judges over my people Israel. Finally, I’m going to give you peace from all your enemies.*

*“Furthermore, GOD has this message for you: GOD himself will build you a house! When your life is complete and you’re buried with your ancestors, then I’ll raise up your child, your own flesh and blood, to succeed you, and I’ll firmly establish his rule. I’ll be a father to him, and he’ll be a son to me. Your family and your kingdom are permanently secured. I’m keeping my eye on them! And your royal throne will always be there, rock solid.”*

**We can forgive David’s ignorance, worrying about God living in a tent while he lived in a palace.** When he moved to erect a temple, God set him straight: you can’t build me a house, but I can build you into an everlasting one. And so we understand that our churches, fine as they are, are not houses for God, but places in which God’s people find a home.

Where should we look for God’s house? How about that poor woman downtown, asking for quarters? God lives there. How about that miserable neighborhood we’re afraid to walk in? God’s on that street. What about that faraway place where the bombs are being dropped? That’s God’s country. And that family with the sick child, the mentally impaired elder? That’s God’s family.

As Catholics, we believe emphatically in God’s presence in Scripture and the Eucharist. But we can’t keep God there, limited to a special place or a Holy of Holies. Whenever people build a house for the Deity, God manages to escape into the world nonetheless. Being the Creator has its privileges.

Name three places you encountered God today.  
What did God have to show you?

## SECOND READING » ROMANS 16:25-27

*All of our praise rises to the One who is strong enough to make you strong, exactly as preached in Jesus Christ, precisely as revealed in the mystery kept secret for so long but now an open book through the prophetic Scriptures. All the nations of the world can now know the truth and be brought into obedient belief, carrying out the orders of God, who got all this started, down to the very last letter.*

*All our praise is focused through Jesus on this incomparably wise God! Yes!*

**What is a revelation?** The root meaning of the word is “to lift the veil,” to communicate the divine mystery to the favored mortal. Revelation refers specifically to God’s self-disclosure; there’s no peeking into eternity. When God wants to be known, God will be known, and on God’s own terms.

Biblical acts of revelation included storms, plagues, and vast destruction. But it’s important to remember God’s original revelation was as Creator, not destroyer. Although some Bible stories focus on God’s ability to wipe out cities or even the population of the planet, the most significant acts of revelation are geared toward salvation. Israel’s preferred title for the Holy One is “the God who saves,” the deliverer from slavery and oppression. Certainly for Christians, what was revealed in the crèche and at the cross was an even more poignant introduction to the God who saves. God lifted the veil once and for all, and stepped to the other side to stand with us. Though mystics still have visions and prophets dream dreams, we aren’t likely to touch God more tangibly than we do in Christ.

**What is the most meaningful portrait of God in the Bible for you?**

## GOSPEL » LUKE 1:26-38

*God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin’s name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:*

*Good morning!  
You’re beautiful with God’s beauty,  
Beautiful inside and out!  
God be with you.*

*She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, “Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.*

*He will be great,*

*be called 'Son of the Highest.'  
The Lord God will give him  
the throne of his father David;  
He will rule Jacob's house forever—  
no end, ever, to his kingdom."*

*Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."  
The angel answered,*

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
the power of the Highest hover over you;  
Therefore, the child you bring to birth  
will be called Holy, Son of God.*

*"And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is?  
Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you  
see, is impossible with God."*

*And Mary said,*

*Yes, I see it all now:  
I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.  
Let it be with me  
just as you say.*

*Then the angel left her.*

**Mary is called the Ark of the Covenant because, of all the places God chooses to dwell, Mary's womb is the most surprising.** The Ark built in Moses' time was an elaborate throne; the Temple that housed it more astonishing still. But neither feat of craftsmanship compared with the body of a young girl who embraced the opportunity to serve God so intimately. She was not only a vessel of God-life, but her life upheld and sustained that union. Mary knit her human life together with God's. Only a mother understands how complete a unity Mary had to make with divinity to arrive at that communion.

The church calls us to be Christ-bearers too. We carry Christ within us in a mystical way that is nonetheless real. We share Christ-life in our sacraments and are temples of Holy Spirit, reserves of wonder and power. We're called to prepare the way for God to pitch a tent into our midst. God's house will never be a gated community, reserved for the privileged few. We hold a treasure, like Mary did; not for ourselves, but for the world.

**How do you bear Christ into the world?**

## **WE RESPOND**

Be a Christ-bearer this Christmas. Don't just bring gifts and eggnog, but also a spirit of reconciliation, compassion, and welcome wherever you go this holiday season.