

# “Making the House Ready For the Lord”

## An Advent Quiet Day

*‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’  
~Isaiah 40:3*

### ***Making the House Ready for the Lord*** ***By Mary Oliver***

*Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but  
Still nothing is as shining as it should be  
For you. Under the sink, for example, is an  
Uproar of mice - it is the season of their  
Many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves  
And through the walls the squirrels  
Have gnawed their ragged entrances - but it is the season  
When they need shelter, so what shall I do? And  
The raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard  
With the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow:  
What shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling  
In the yard and the fox who is staring boldly  
Up the path to the door. And still I believe you will  
Come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,  
The sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know  
That really I am speaking to you whenever I say,  
As I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.*

The theme of this advent quiet day is taken from the title of Mary Oliver’s poem, *Making the House Ready for the Lord*. While the poem lays out a way to prepare the way for the Lord by welcoming all the little critters that inhabit the poet’s home, I think the title alone offers enough for us to contemplate how we might prepare our hearts and lives for the Incarnated One among and within us. Please use the suggested practices listed below to help guide you this day as you think more deeply about how God might be inviting you to make a place for Godself within the nitty gritty, mundane, chaotic, or messy context of your own life. If these suggestions are not working with you or where you are at today, then feel free to pass on any or all of them. These are simply here for you to grow deeper into awareness of God, to help pave the way for the Holy One to incarnate your life.

A couple of questions which might help give you focus as you enter more deeply into the day are:

- ❖ In what ways might God be asking you to prepare your house (heart, life, relationships, etc) so that Jesus might come?
- ❖ In what areas of your life might you need to do some sorting out, tidying, airing out, or mending?
- ❖ In what parts of your life do you already see Christ making a home? How can you nurture the growth of the Holy One in this area of your life?

### Structure of the day:

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| 9:30am  | Morning Prayer                                 |
| 10:00am | Overview of the day/theme/practice suggestions |
| 12:30pm | Midday prayer                                  |
| 3:00pm  | Re-gathering, debriefing, closing prayer       |

### Suggested Practices/activities for the day:

#### 1. *Write an Acrostic Psalm*

Read Psalm 111 (1 of the 7 acrostic psalms) and then read the example of an acrostic prayer below. Take an inventory of your last month (or week) - jotting down some notes about *what happened, how you felt, how you were provided for, what you were surprised by and worried about, what do you long for?* Then, looking at your notes, fill out the acrostic on the next page, not worrying too much about the coherence or profundity of what is being written. See if the format frees you to express yourself to God, to pray, or to praise God in new ways. This is a sample Acrostic Poem created by Vanessa....

**A**nother year, another month, another day you've  
**B**rought me: thank you.  
**C**onfession has been my friend, allowing me to ask, mid-  
**D**ay, if i can start over. This month I've been swept into your  
**E**conomy of grace, where I need friends and  
**F**riends need me, so regularly that I have lost track of the score! It's unnerving, but  
**G**ood. God,  
**H**ow I take for granted the  
**I**mpermanence of all the things I enjoy: my stuff, the people I love, my life as I know it.  
**J**esus lived so differently, as if according to an internal clock, where instead of

Killing time, he kept in time; with a face set like flint *and* interruptible, somehow. Which reminds me:  
Limitations keep me sane. Forgive me for despising them. Keep me bad at  
Multitasking, multi-attending, multi-treasuring. It doesn't work. Your  
Non-anxious presence baffles me, when you have so much to  
Oversee! The world, history, evil, and heaven!, much less *my* petty prayers, like this 1:  
Protect me from Black Friday emails -  
Quickly! - or I'll click on them and lose an hour of my time, and an inch of my soul. (and did!)  
Remembering some gifts of this last month helps: like  
Saladbowl with Aneeta and family,  
Tea time after school with Leo, and that day Steven spent  
Uncluttering our closets. These are the things that don't make my to-do list, yet they are true  
Virtues, disguised in neighbors, kindergarteners and husbands.  
Wean me from my addiction to myself gently, oh God. I give you permission to  
eXamine the requests I present to you, and reroute me according to  
Your will. When it comes to my salvation and the restoration of all creation, I have  
Zero good ideas, save one: to turn to you, the Alpha and the Omega, the one who was and is and is to  
come. Do come! Amen.

*A*

*B*

*C*

*D*

*E*

*F*

*G*

*H*

*I*

*J*

*K*

*L*

*M*

*N*

*O*

*P*

*Q*

*R*

*S*

*T*

*U*

*V*

*W*

*X*

*Y*

*Z*

## ***2. Contemplative walk***

Take a slow walk through your neighbourhood. Imagine God walking in front of you or beside you. Every few minutes (or whenever your mind travels or you get antsy or discouraged) ask one of the two questions below. See what you see, hear what you hear, hold onto what you receive (even if you don't know what it means).

*What do You want of me? (Teresa's) or  
How can I make my life ready for You?*

### **Teresa of Avila**

Intimacy with Scripture

(From Avila, *Poetry*, pp 378-379)

Calvary or Tabor give me,  
Desert or fruitful land;  
As Job in suffering  
Or John at Your breast;  
Barren or fruited vine,  
Whatever be Your will:  
*What do You want of me?*

Be I Joseph chained  
Or as Egypt's governor,  
David pained  
Or exalted high,  
Jonas drowned,  
Or Jonas freed:  
*What do You want of me?"*

Rosemary Broughton. 1990. *Praying with Teresa of Avila*,  
from the Companions for the Journey series.  
St. Mary's Press: Winna, MN. Page. 27.

### *3. Build/paint/draw an altar to God*

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

~Rumi

Advent is a time to reflect on and become aware of our deepest longings. It is a time to get in touch with the aspects of our lives and this world that we are awaiting fulfillment: a sense of vocation/purpose in our lives/work, reconciliation between family members, justice for the poor, an end to violence and oppression - there is no shortage of things we long for God to make right in our lives and in this world. Advent helps to get us in touch with those deeper longings, so that we can orient our lives to make way for God to fulfill them. As well, advent is also a time to reorient our lives to Love, to get our hearts ready to say “Yes” to God’s invitation to us to bring forth Love into this world.

An altar serves as a visual focus of your spiritual intentions, affirmations, prayers, and energy. It also serves as a place to go, be quiet, re-calibrate your mind, and re-ground your energy. An altar can be right where you are. In an open field, in your parked car, or in a private place in your home. *What might be on your altar this advent season?*

Take some time to journal, pray or contemplate your own altar to God - perhaps this might be a recommitment to God to willingly allow the work of Love to transform your life. You can consider the following questions if you need some more help:

- ★ Where do you feel like God might be knocking in your life? Will you open the door? What stands in the way of that door opening?
- ★ What might Love be asking of you this season? What would it look like for your life to reflect more Love in this world? What holds you back from embodying it?
- ★ Do you sense an invitation to bear in, a particular way, Christ in this world? Perhaps you might have the courage on this quiet day to express what you sense that might be.

After you have reflected on these questions or anything else that has come up for you in this time, think about how you might want to create an altar to God, to offer to Them your intentions, to symbolize the way that you are re-grounding your whole self in Love.

Create/draw/paint/describe your altar.

#### 4. *Guided Meditation*

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14. This is not a traditional advent passage (it takes place 6 centuries before Christ's birth), however it might be a useful passage to meditate on because of our current conditions. It takes place during a time of exile, where God speaks to Ezekiel about how restoration within a dislocated disillusioned community can happen. If you are feeling thrown into a season of exile, this might be a good mediation for you.

Before you begin the mediation, I suggest that you read Ezekiel 37:1-14. The meditation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUiwLdsGU1Y&feature=youtu.be>

#### 5. *Poetry for contemplation*

Below are a number of poems related to annunciation that you are welcome to spend time contemplating. Perhaps they might be an inspiration to write your own! :)

##### **Annunciation – Marie Howe**

Even if I don't see it again—nor ever feel it  
I know it is—and that if once it hailed me  
it ever does—  
And so it is myself I want to turn in that  
direction  
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting  
within myself,  
as one turns a mirror to flash the light to  
where  
it isn't—I was blinded like that—and swam  
in what shone at me  
only able to endure it by being no one and so  
specifically myself I thought I'd die  
from being loved like that.

##### **Annunciation by Scott Cairns**

Deep within the clay, and O my people  
very deep within the wholly earthen  
compound of our kind arrives of one clear,  
star-illumined evening a spark igniting  
once again the tinder of our lately  
banked noetic fire. She burns but she  
is not consumed. The dew lights gently,

suffusing the pure fleece. The wall comes  
down.

And—*do you feel the pulse?*—we all become  
the kindled kindred of a King whose birth  
thereafter bears to all a bright nativity.

##### **Magnificat – Mary Pratt**

Under pine trees in the snow,  
the chickadees around my head,  
I wept for the will of God,  
this hungry woman fed.  
All the shadows shifted  
while my back was turned.  
Once and always on my finger  
one soft and small gray bird.  
Not a twisting  
due to prayer,  
but all its own,  
and mine together.  
And so I bear the gift,  
carry it through time—  
this deepest darkness,  
astonishing grace.

**Annunciation – Denise Levertov**

*'Hail, space for the uncontained God'  
From the Agathistos Hymn,  
Greece, VIc*

We know the scene: the room, variously  
furnished,  
almost always a lectern, a book; always  
the tall lily.

Arrived on solemn grandeur of great  
wings,  
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,  
whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one  
mentions  
courage.

The engendering Spirit  
did not enter her without consent.  
God waited.

She was free  
to accept or to refuse, choice  
integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations  
of one sort or another  
in most lives?

Some unwillingly  
undertake great destinies,  
enact them in sullen pride,  
uncomprehending.  
More often  
those moments

when roads of light and storm  
open from darkness in a man or woman,  
are turned away from

in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair  
and with relief.  
Ordinary lives continue.

God does not smite them.  
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She had been a child who played, ate, slept  
like any other child—but unlike others,  
wept only for pity, laughed  
in joy not triumph.

Compassion and intelligence  
fused in her, indivisible.

Called to a destiny more momentous  
than any in all of Time,  
she did not quail,  
only asked  
a simple, 'How can this be?'  
and gravely, courteously,  
took to heart the angel's reply,  
the astounding ministry she was offered:

to bear in her womb  
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry  
in hidden, finite inwardness,  
nine months of Eternity; to contain  
in slender vase of being,  
the sum of power—  
in narrow flesh,  
the sum of light.

Then bring to birth,  
push out into air, a Man-child  
needing, like any other,  
milk and love—

but who was God.

This was the moment no one speaks of,  
when she could still refuse.

A breath unbreathed,  
Spirit,  
suspended,  
waiting.

She did not cry, 'I cannot. I am not worthy,'  
Nor, 'I have not the strength.'  
She did not submit with gritted teeth,  
raging, coerced.

Bravest of all humans,  
consent illumined her.  
The room filled with its light,  
the lily glowed in it,  
and the iridescent wings.

Consent,  
courage unparalleled,  
opened her utterly.

**Before we re-gather together at 3pm**, perhaps you want to come up with one thing to share with the group about how the day was for you. Of course, if you don't want to share, you don't have to at all! However, if you do feel inclined, perhaps there is a word, an image, a piece of art, or something that you picked up on your walk that you might want to share with the group as a way to let others into your journey this day. Sharing is not mandatory but it can be a way to offer to others a gift of what has been given to you.

And of course, if this day seemed to have nothing significant, that's also ok! We can "trust in the slow work of God"...

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.  
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.*

*And yet it is the law of all progress  
That it is made by passing through some stages of instability-  
And that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;  
Your ideas mature gradually - let them grow,  
Let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on,  
As though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)  
Will make of you tomorrow.  
Only God could say what this new spirit  
Gradually forming within you will be.*

*Give our Lord the benefit of believing  
That his hand is leading you,  
And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
In suspense and incomplete.*

Teilhard de Chardi





Artist: Henry Ossawa Turner - Annunciation



Artist: Patricia Brintle – Annunciation



Artist: Mike Moyers – Annunciation