

PAUSE. NOTICE. WONDER.
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT: PEACE
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I see none of you wore crash helmets to worship today.

That's OK, I didn't either. But I still think it's a good idea for Advent.

Today's lesson isn't about signs in the stars and roaring seas,
but it's every bit as earth-shaking as last week's.

When the Reign of God bursts into our lives, it's guaranteed to interrupt business as usual.

Today's Candle is the Peace candle, and our usual assumption
is that Peace is all about calmness and brightness and quiet.

Make no mistake, God's peace is aimed at turning the world around.

Waging peace is hard work that interrupts business as usual; it ain't for sissies.

Jesus constantly interrupted business as usual by healing the untouchable,
respecting foreign women, overturning the tables of religious corruption,
and rising from the dead. It's sort of God's M.O., Method of Operation.

It was God's way from the beginning of creation,
and the beginning of Jesus' life on earth was hardly business as usual.

Mary was interrupted when the Reign of God came into her life.

What was it like for her the day Gabriel showed up?

Most medieval paintings show a serene, wealthy Mary reading,¹
presumably a book of prayers,

which is undoubtedly the one thing she was NOT doing
because back then, who taught women to read?

Plus, she was a peasant woman marrying a man who didn't own any land.

That put them on the social ladder just above servants and slaves.

No fine linen for this young woman.

It was far more likely to be a scene like this one,²

a poor Mary, busy with laborious household chores
maybe carrying buckets of water from the communal village well.

Gabriel came and interrupted her business as usual.

I think she could have ignored him. Who knows how many already had?

So many of us see something unusual, something we don't understand,
but keep hurrying on, fixated on getting whatever we just have to get done.

Sometimes God does act by knocking us to our knees, but in my experience,
there are many more times when the intrusion of the divine into everyday life is as subtle as a sigh.

Thank God, Mary wasn't too rushed to pause, to notice, to wonder.

Taking the time to pause, notice, and wonder is the basis of many saints' stories.

As Moses was tending his sheep, a messenger of God appeared in the form of a burning bush,
interrupting business as usual. He could have rushed on after his flock.

Instead he paused, noticed, and wondered what that amazing sight might mean.

Moses then waged God's peace and turned the world around. (Ex. 3:1-30)



¹ *The Annunciation*, Leonard da Vinci, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

² From a series of videos by Mormons (or, as they prefer to be called now, the Latter Day Saints),
<https://www.lds.org/bible-videos/videos/an-angel-foretells-christs-birth-to-mary?lang=eng>

Today's Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

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When a strange man interrupted Mary's chores, greeting her like no one had ever greeted her before, she could have bolted in fear like a jackrabbit

Instead, she paused, she noticed, and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

Mary waged God's peace and turned the world around.

It's not just old-time Biblical figures that do this.

When I was in seminary,³ Loxi Dailey was the Registrar, the person who got you signed up for the right courses.

She was far more than that, though. She was basically the campus mom.

Most of the students who attended had to move there.

Some came straight from college, and the masters-level studies freaked some of them out.

Many students were second career and had to either leave families,

or uproot them and move them to Columbus, Ohio, which, as they say,

is a great place to live, but you wouldn't want to visit there. It took time to learn to love it.

A few students came from other countries, like Africa.

We ALL went to see Loxi when things were tough.

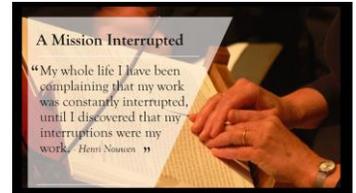
As a commuter who already had two degrees, I didn't have many issues, but, like everyone, I had to see Loxi to sign up for classes.

While waiting in her office one day while she finished up a phone call,

I looked at the 200 signs and plaques adorning her office walls.

One of them was a quote from Henri Nouwen:

*My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work.*⁴



Loxi made a ministry out of interruptions: she paused, she noticed, she wondered what was going on – really going on – in your life.

She had a disarming way of finding out, too, even if YOU thought you'd gone in there to switch from the morning to the afternoon section of Systematic Theology.

After pausing, noticing and wondering, she calmed frantic students down, helped seminary spouses find jobs, helped me navigate the Land of Lutherans, and listened to Patrick, a dear Anglican priest from Uganda, a husband and loving father of 4 who was sent by his Anglican bishop to study for 2 years to get an advanced degree.

Patrick arrived with a week's worth of clothes, \$200 pocket money, and no winter coat.

Loxi paused, noticed and wondered what an Ohio winter would be like for him.

She called together some of us Ohioans who knew about the brutal winters.

We collected coats, hats, and enough other stuff to keep Patrick toasty.

For Patrick, now a bishop in Uganda, Loxi was no less important than the bush was to Moses or Gabriel was to Mary.

Loxi waged God's peace and turned the world around for him.

Pause. Notice. Wonder. Where is God showing up in this moment?

A few centuries ago, in the heavily Roman Catholic parts of Europe,

there was a spiritual discipline whose very purpose was to interrupt business as usual.

It was the Angelus Prayer.⁵ Three times a day, at 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m.,

the bells on the local church would ring nine times – 3 sets of 3.

Not only in monasteries and naves, but in homes, in fields, on the docks, wherever the bell was heard, people would stop and pray the Angelus prayer.



³ Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. I've never been a Lutheran, but I sure learned a lot from the amazing people there.

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelus>

The core of the prayer is what is commonly known as the “Hail, Mary,”
the prayer based on our reading for today: *Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you;
blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

From bishops to peasants, people paused their business as usual,
took notice of how God acted in the world, and, in wonder,
gave glory to God for saving them, sinners though they might be.

The strain of theology may be foreign to many of us,
but this prayerful practice shows that when God interrupts business as usual,
we have a choice: stop and notice what’s going on right in front of us, or to keep rushing on.
Moses, Mary, Loxi and millions across the centuries stopped their rushing
to pause, notice and wonder.

Maybe we should to, not just as a matter of our own spiritual growth,
but as a way of waging peace in the world today,
waging the kind of peace that just might turn the world around.

We all can pause, notice and wonder pretty easily in our own homes,
but God is pretty active out in the world, don’t you think?

How can we notice what God is doing there?

I’m sure our frantic secular culture will never get back to the days
where the ringing of the Angelus bells brought a whole village to a full stop. What might WE use?

You can thank Bing Crosby for the inspiration of this idea.

One of our old Christmas CDs was playing the other day, and I was, well, interrupted,
when I heard these words: *Strings of street lights, even stop lights, blink a bright red and green.*⁶

Stop lights. Those bring ALMOST everyone to a stop several times a day.

What if, for the rest of Advent, instead of cursing them as we scurry around in our business as usual,
red lights become our burning bush, our angel, our Angelus bell,
our way of waging peace so the world turns around?

Pause. Notice. Wonder. Where is God present right this moment?

What about the young man next to you with the bass booming?

How can you pray for him, without any snark at all?

There, the harried young mom in that SUV with kids yelling?

That old lady with all over her earthly possessions crammed into a metal basket with wheels?

The guy by the side of the road with the sign that says simply, “Hungry. Please help. God bless?”

The store with the “Going out of business Sale” sign in the window? What happened to that dream?

The person who guns their engines and races through the yellow light? What’s life like for them?

Or my favorite: the ones with their windows up tight, singing at the top of their lungs?

Did you notice the sunrise peaking over the trees?

The other day, I saw thousands of blackbirds perched on wires. What a sight!

It’s Advent. The Prince of Peace is near, coming to turn this world around.

As we sit at a red light, we can be like Moses, like Mary, like Loxi.

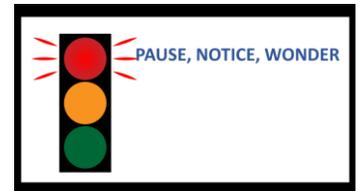
Our everyday business has already been interrupted. Pause. Notice. Wonder.

Before the light changes, say a prayer –

of thanksgiving, or for healing, courage, insight, or even patience.

Then, when the light turns green: Go. Go wage some peace,⁷

be a partner in God’s grace, as Paul puts it: the grace that is turning the world around.



⁶ *Silver Bells*, sung by Bing Crosby & Carol Richards, performed by John Scott Trotter Orchestra and the Lee Gordon Singers; October 1950; Words and Music by Jay Livingston & Ray Evan

⁷ A small card with this picture, suitable for putting on one’s car dashboard, was handed out to everyone in church.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming, give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

BARUCH 5:1-9

Take off your mourning clothes and oppression, Jerusalem! Dress yourself in the dignity of God's glory forever. Wrap the justice that comes from God around yourself like a robe. Place the eternal one's glory on your head like a crown. God will show your brilliance everywhere under heaven. God will give you this name by which to be called forever: The Peace That Comes from Justice, The Honor That Comes from Reverence for God! Get up, Jerusalem!

Stand on the high place, and look around to the east! See your children gathered from the west to the east by the holy one's word, as they rejoice that God has remembered them. They went out from you on foot, driven along by their enemies, but God will bring them back to you, carried aloft with glory as on a royal throne. God has ordered every high mountain and the eternal hills to be brought down, and the valleys to be filled in to level the ground so that Israel may walk safely in God's glory. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel with God's command. God will lead Israel with gladness by the light that shines forth from his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

CANTICLE 16

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old, that he would save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. To all those in Philippi who are God's people in Christ Jesus, along with your bishops and deacons. May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it's always a prayer full of joy. I'm glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus. I have good reason to think this way about all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my partners in God's grace, both during my time in prison and in the defense and support of the gospel. God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. I pray this so that you will be able to decide what really matters and so you will be sincere and blameless on the day of Christ. I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God.

LUKE 1:26b-38

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord

God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God."

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

SERMON HYMN: *My Soul Cries Out*