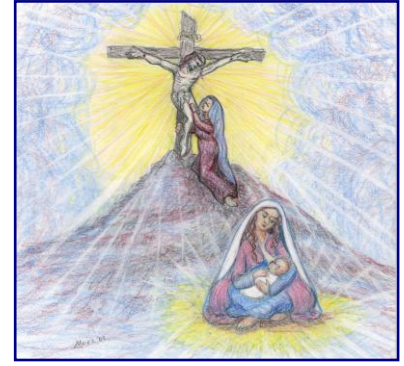


# Advent Evensong

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Years ago I remember seeing a photo in a magazine of a Christmas tableau: In the foreground is Mary, a young mother, serenely holding her baby Jesus. Behind her on a scrim was a picture of an older Mary, full of grief, at the foot of the cross.



*'A Birth into Hope' 1Pt 1:3*

I thought, 'How odd to have these two pictures juxtaposition so at Christmas time.' Upon reflection, though, I realized many woman of the ancient world gave birth in poor conditions and many women in the ancient world saw their sons crucified. But we, anticipating the celebration of this particular birth, and death of this one man, Jesus, can make sense of it only because of the resurrection, and of Jesus' promise to be Emmanuel 'with us to the end of the age.' Mt 28:20

But what about now? We are a people stuck in the middle time. During this season we recall Jesus first coming as a baby, the longed for Messiah, as we await his Second Coming as the King of Glory. Yet, being stuck in this middle time isn't really bad because, in truth, not only has Jesus come and is coming, but Jesus, the Lord of all Hope, is here with us right now living among us.

Where? Where else, but in each and every heart!

Advent is a time to welcome Jesus more deeply, more dearly, into our hearts so to share Jesus' love more clearly in all our words and actions thus making this middle time, this now, a visible witness of the kingdom of God active and alive in the present moment.

My friend, John the Baptist, in today's Gospel invites us to 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.' Mk 1:3 That made me think of that Spanish proverb, 'God writes straight with crooked lines,' and Isaiah's voice crying out about the rugged land being made smooth. Top this off with something I read recently of an old wise black woman who said, 'If the mountain is smooth you cannot climb it.' Straight paths, crooked lines, rugged land, smooth mountains. How can we prepare the way to the Lord with such differing instructions and observations?

Our Foundress, Ven. Maria Celeste, had the answer: the fixed gaze. With our gaze fixed on Jesus we will make a straight path for Emmanuel to come into our hearts where 'he will guide us in the way of faith that is alive in hope, and charity, that leads directly to heaven.' (Florilegium 19) With our gaze fixed on Jesus we will see, usually in retrospect, how

the crooked lines of our life are leading us straight to God according to God's Divine Love. Then we will be able to climb the rugged mountain, not the smooth, because we know the surest path is not the slippery slope, but rather the one we can hold on to; the rocks and boulders of our life: the highs and lows of our work-a-day life, the joys and sorrows, the challenges and struggles. All are means to climbing the heights to see clearer God's action in our lives.

So, as we climb the rugged mountain along our crooked paths this Advent with our eyes fixed straight ahead on Jesus, let us sing praises to our God who is present to us in the here and now by our acts of faith, hope and love, as we strive to be visible witnesses of Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, and in us, to one another.