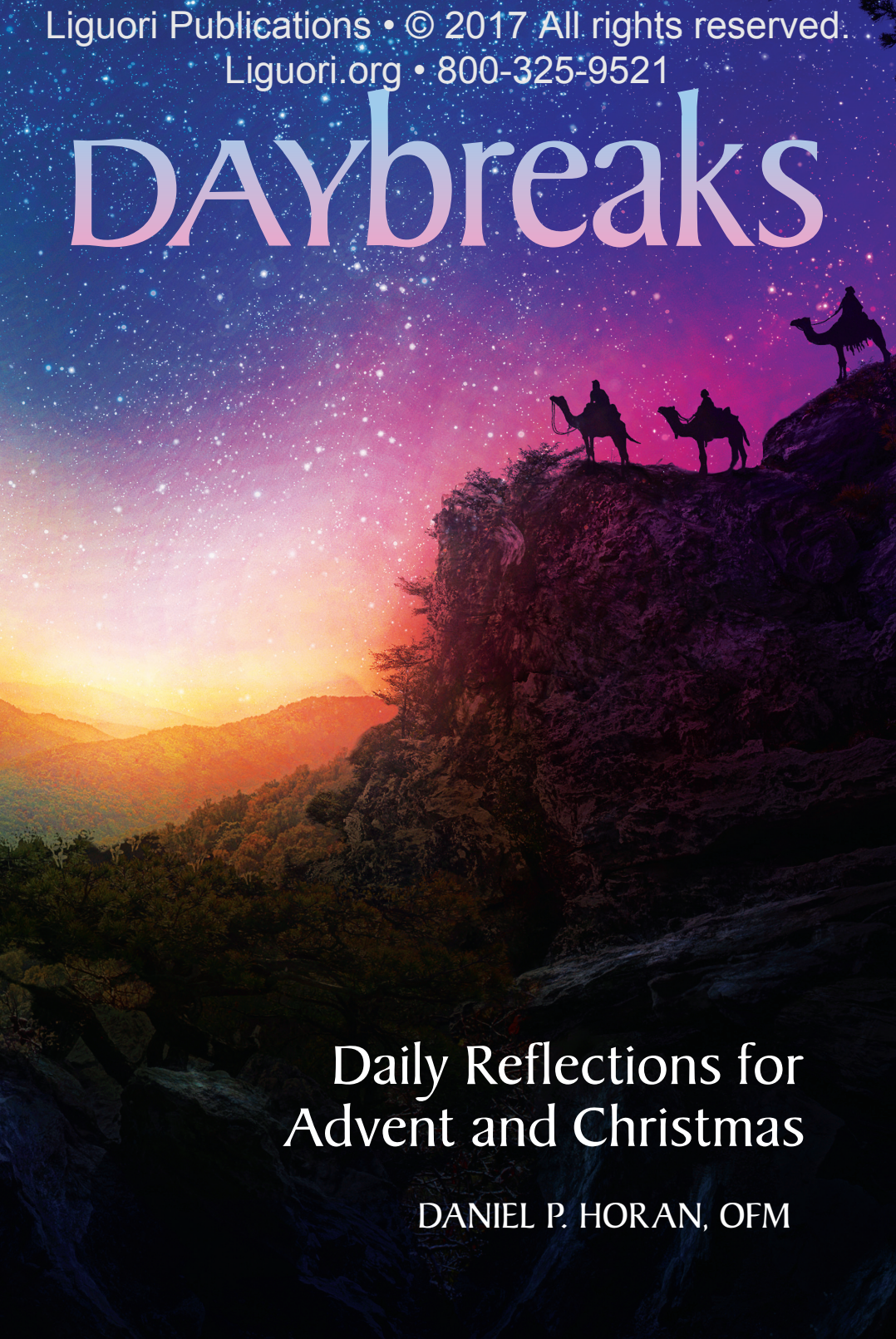


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DAYbreaks



Daily Reflections for
Advent and Christmas

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Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri 63057.

To order, call 800-325-9521, or visit Liguori.org.

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ISBN: 978-0-7648-2730-03

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Cover design: Lorena Mitre Jimenez

Cover image: Amanda Carden/Shutterstock

Interior design and production: Wendy Barnes and John Krus

Product development team:

Mary Wuertz von Holt, Chuck Healy, and August Sexauer

Printed in the United States of America • First Edition

21 20 19 18 17 / 5 4 3 2 1

Prayer

*Creator of the stars of night,
your people's everlasting light,
O Christ, redeemer of us all,
we know you hear us when we call.
Amen.*

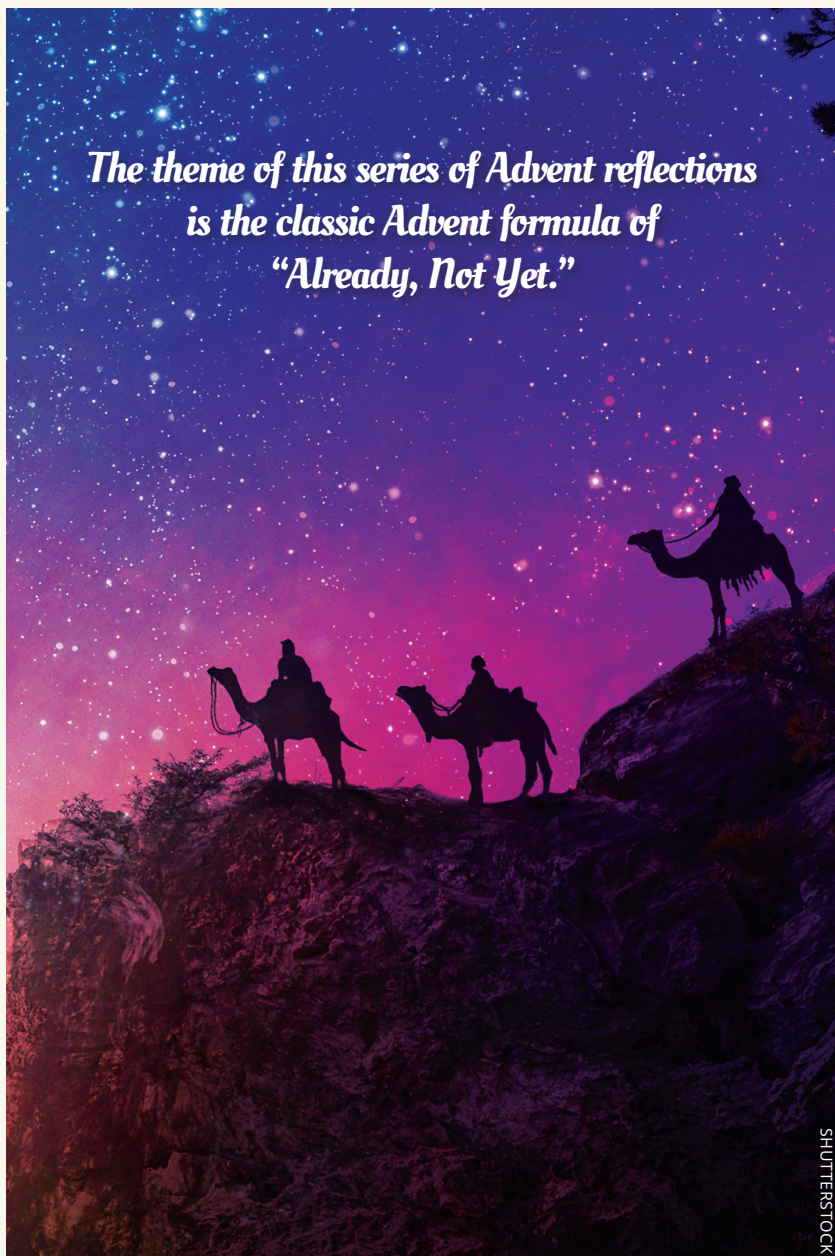
Growing up in the Northern Hemisphere, I experienced Advent as a time of paradox: The closer we got to the celebration of the Incarnation at Christmas, the darker the skies became, and the autumn days quickly turned more and more into winter nights. Like me, the author of the ancient Advent hymn "*Conditor alme siderum*" ("Creator of the Stars") very likely lived in the Northern Hemisphere and was used to seeing the darkness of night lengthen as the coming of Christ neared. For more than a thousand years, the Christian church has chanted this beautiful prayer at evening, turning each day into a miniature Advent, into a season of hopeful waiting for the light of Christ to appear at dawn. This reflection series is aptly titled *Daybreaks*, for it is intended to provide a resource for those looking for light in the darkness. It is geared toward those awaiting a new dawn after a long, cold night.

The theme of this series of Advent reflections is the classic Advent formula of "Already, Not Yet." For each day of the season I have selected and hope to bring new light to a short Scripture passage, one that you may know. These passages will often provide a starting point for reflecting on how our faith is already handed to us but not yet perfectly lived. My hope is that what follows may provide an opportunity for prayer and reflection on the coming of our Savior, whose love, mercy, forgiveness, and redemption has already been given but has not yet been fully realized in our lives.

The ancient hymn to the Creator of the stars of night and of the entire cosmos—that which is visible and invisible—is both a call to prayer and an affirmation of faith. I offer it to you as a refrain to be used each day before praying the Scripture passages and reflections that follow. May it also serve to rekindle the fire in your heart to know God, whose overflowing generosity has brought all that ever was, is now, and will be into existence for us. It is this Creator God who sustains all creation and invites us to know the saving work that is both already and not yet.

Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM

*The theme of this series of Advent reflections
is the classic Advent formula of
“Already, Not Yet.”*



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*He shall judge between the nations, and set terms for many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into
pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.*

Isaiah 2:4



As a new liturgical year begins, it can be difficult at times to see what is really all that new about it. Some of life's patterns are comforting and assuring, like the rising and setting of the sun, while others can be disconcerting or even terrifying, like the onset of a powerful storm. This latter sort is the theme of this passage from Isaiah, who promises that some of the disconcerting and terrifying things we regularly witness in life can be changed.

This eschatological hope for things yet unseen—peace and comfort the world cannot give, the universal kinship of all creation that has yet to be recognized fully—is expressed prophetically in the ancient proclamation of Isaiah as much as it is expressed poetically in the 1971 song by John Lennon. The lyrics of Lennon's "Imagine" come to mind as I pray with today's Scripture. It serves as a secular prayer for yet another gift of the

*The lyrics of John
Lennon's "Imagine"
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Holy Spirit, one not counted among the usual seven. This is the gift of imagination, a virtue and skill necessary to live out the prophetic call of Isaiah and the gospel call of Christ. Lennon invited his hearers to imagine the possibility that things that divide us—nationalism, greed, possessiveness, and even at times religion—were nonexistent. Could we imagine giving up our excuses for exclusion, our reasons for retaliation?

Isaiah's Advent call is one that challenges us to imagine an end to violence and division. It invites us to consider working toward the world that God has always intended from the beginning of creation. It is a reminder of the fulfilled promise we anticipate during Advent

and celebrate at Christmas, when God entered the world as one of us to show us that what we imagine isn't fantasy or foolishness but truly possible; to show us that we may say Isaiah is a dreamer, but in this season of Advent, he's not the only one.



*Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof;
only say the word and my servant will be healed.*

Matthew 8:8



I have been surprised to encounter a number of people over the years who share that they've stopped going to Mass or participating in the sacramental life of the Church because they felt unworthy to do so. For some reason they came to believe that the sacraments were only for the righteous, the sinless in the eyes of God, the saints. Whether by their own accord or on account of what another person said to them, these individuals announced with no sense of false humility that they were not worthy for the Lord to enter into their lives, so they would save Christ the trouble of rejecting them by, in practice if not by intention, rejecting him first.

***Advent can be a perfect
time for new beginnings.***

The centurion in Matthew's Gospel is a kindred spirit with those who feel this way. Aware of the need his household and his life had for healing, he seems paralyzed before Christ because of his own sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. He attempts to preempt Jesus, who in turn assures the man that his own sense of limitedness and sin cannot in fact separate him from the love and grace of God.

Advent can be a perfect time for new beginnings. It is a time of preparation, of renewal, of celebration that indeed nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38–39). No one is worthy to receive the gifts God has freely given to us, especially the gift of God's very self at Christmas. And yet the generosity of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness exceeds all of our imagining. The real barrier we face in inviting Jesus into our lives isn't that he would never come, it's that we are too often afraid or ashamed to ask.

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I say to you many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Luke 10:23-24



I wonder whether I would have really recognized Jesus for who he was if I were around during his earthly ministry. Likewise, even as a Franciscan friar today, I have my doubts about whether I would have joined St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century or whether I would have—like many of his peers—simply thought he was crazy and kept my distance from him.

I find these thoughts both comforting and unsettling. They're comforting in that I know there were many people at both times who had this experience of doubt or outright lacked the ability to recognize how God was at work before them. We see that implied in Jesus' words to his disciples in Luke's Gospel. Their eyes are blessed because they are seeing what has long been expected, that for which so many people longed to see. And still they so often didn't get it. Even the disciples deny, betray, and abandon him. They sometimes mistake Jesus for a civil or military leader. They seek positions of influence or power. They exclude others from drawing near.

These thoughts are also unsettling because we know so much more than those early followers. Even in Advent we await not the first coming of Christ but now wait in joyful hope for the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation for the whole world. We should know better. I should know better. And I should follow Jesus without reservations. How slow I can be to trust God.

This Advent I pray for the courage to see with open eyes that which is before me: the faith tradition that has been handed on to us, for which many prophets and kings longed to see. Christ remains present in our midst: in the word, in the Eucharist, and in one another. May we overcome our fear and doubt so we can recognize *Emmanuel*, God with us.